



“Just because I’ve gone to prison, my mum hat doesn’t switch off”:
An analysis of Black mothers’ narratives of imprisonment and life after
release

*A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in Criminology*

by

Monica Iona Thomas

Supervised by

Main Supervisor: Dr Alisa Stevens

Second Supervisor: Prof. Alyson Rees

School of Social Sciences (SOCSCI)

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Abstract

Guided by a Black feminist narrative approach, this thesis details the intersectional experiences of Black mothers during and after their imprisonment within the penal jurisdiction of England and Wales, with emphasis placed on exploring the complexity and multifaceted nature of such experiences, rather than seeking to portray something singular or monolith. To do this, between April 2020 and December 2020 I conducted semi-structured narrative interviews with nine mothers who identified as Black or Black-mixed-race and were, or had previously been, imprisoned in the women's prison estate in England, as there are no women's prisons in Wales. My decision to foreground Black mothering narratives distinguishes this research from the vast body of criminological literature that uses 'Whiteness' as an overarching standard to which all people racialised as 'non-White' are grouped together and compared against. This thesis thus contributes to the development of a Black Feminist Criminology that is responsive to the personal and collective histories that uniquely shape Black women's experiences of criminal justice (see Potter 2006). Building upon existing sociological and criminological frameworks, the key findings presented in this thesis can be grouped into four main overarching concepts: (1) 'reproductive oppression' (see Hayes et al 2020), (2) 'the [racialised] pains of [maternal] imprisonment' (see Sykes 1986), (3) 'motherwork' (see Collins 1984) and (4) 'responsibilisation'. Close attention is thus given to how existing frameworks can be reworked and expanded to provide a new and informed understanding of the multi-layered identities and experiences of Black mothers during and after imprisonment. Throughout the thesis, attention is also placed on theoretical conceptualisations of time, which I describe as being 'Stretched', 'Sticky' and 'Missed' in relation to Black mothering narratives of imprisonment, reflecting the temporal relationship between processes of racialisation and imprisonment. Based on my analysis of the mothers' narratives, I conclude that a Black feminist abolitionist stance is necessary for the imagining of new worlds and the challenging of our current one, to advocate for a future where racialised and gendered oppressions are no longer woven into the fabric of societal institutions and where justice is rooted in care, safety and restoration rather than harm.

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Abbreviations

ACCT: Assessment, Care in Custody Teamwork

CJA: Criminal Justice Alliance

CJS: Criminal Justice System

CRL: Childcare Resettlement Licence

HM: Her/His Majesty's

HMP: Her/His Majesty's Prison

HMPPS: Her/His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service

IMB: Independent Monitoring Board

MBUs: Mother and Baby Unit

NRC: National Research Committee

OM: Offender Manager

Pact: Prison Advice and Care Trust

ROTL: Release on Temporary Licence

UK: United Kingdom

YOI: Young Offender Institution

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Chapter One

Introduction

“If you’ve never been in prison before it’s quite a dehumanising experience. I think even if you have been - the minute that you get into the prison most of us have been in some sort of trauma; and there’s no support when you get there. It’s all about urine samples and labelling and testing... It’s horrific ... Even if you’re on remand you’re just like – you know, you haven’t been tried yet ... A really harsh environment” Donna

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces my thesis, entitled *“Just because I’ve gone to prison, my mum hat doesn’t switch off”*: An analysis of Black mothers’ narratives of imprisonment and life after release’. I begin with a personal reflection relating to my motivations for starting on this research journey back in 2018. I then provide some contextual information regarding the women’s prison estate and its structural characteristics, as well as highlighting the disproportionate rates of imprisonment experienced by Black women in England and Wales. Following this, I introduce the theoretical positioning that underpins this thesis, rationalised further in Chapter Four, in regard to the specific focus on Black mothers as well as a Black feminist and narrative criminological approach. I give an introductory note on the research design and methodology that is also explained in more depth in Chapter Four. To conclude the chapter, I present a succinct overview of my thesis and briefly set out the key theoretical and methodological contributions to knowledge that it provides.

1.2 Personal Motivation

“Radical simply means grasping things at the root”

Davis (1989: 14)

Reflecting on my motivations for undertaking this research has been an interesting process as so much has changed in the past few years. I initially chose to focus on the experiences of Black¹ mothers through conducting PhD research as during my Undergraduate and Masters’ courses I had noticed how conversations of imprisonment, motherhood and family life were

¹ In section 2.2 I provide a definition of the socially constructed term ‘Black’ in relation to the context of this thesis. In short, however, ‘Black’ is conceptualised here as an identity classification that describes people who identify as belonging to the African diaspora and who may share collective experiences as a result of their cultural identity and/or the social meaning attributed to their physical appearance.

often constructed as de-racialised. However, as a Black-mixed-race woman and daughter, I was seeking representations of motherhood and imprisonment that acknowledged the intersectional nature of experience and the particular processes of racialisation that would likely shape Black mothers' and their families' experiences of imprisonment. Through my research, I wanted to centre the thoughts feelings and experiences of Black mothers in a way that valued both personal and shared perspectives, with the aim of advocating for more appropriate support and provision in the prison system and wider society.

Whilst writing this PhD, I also worked for the Prison Advice and Care Trust (Pact) in a category B prison for men between 2018 and 2022. I initially worked as a volunteer and eventually became employed as a part-time Family Support Worker for the charity. My role as a Family Support Worker involved advocating on behalf of the men and their families through liaising with internal agencies in the prison (such as healthcare, prison staff, the mental health team, visits staff) and external agencies (such as social services, other third sectors organisations, solicitors and family courts). It also involved facilitating research to improve the charities' service as well as providing the men and their families with both practical (such as form filling, information about their rights, assisting legal visits, supporting social visits) and emotional support.

It was through this work with Pact, that I became aware of the different processes which characterise the prison system (such as complaint procedures, application processes, the regime and visits) as well as the processes in other institutions, such as social services and family courts that the men, especially those who were fathers, often had to navigate and the difficulties they experienced when doing so. The harms of the prison system thus became more apparent through this work, such as the pains of parental separation and familial separation (sometimes permanently), as well as the injustices that were entrenched within the system as reflected in racism and other classed, religious and health inequalities. Reflecting back on this time, the theoretical knowledge I gained from my PhD helped shape my delivery of family support. At the same time, the practical experience I was developing as a Family Support Worker informed my knowledge of the prison system and the harms associated with it, which then shaped the ongoing development of this thesis as well as my conversations with the mothers who chose to share their experiences with me.

As I have journeyed through the PhD process, my motivations for conducting this research have evolved, as have my personal opinions and understandings relating to the criminal justice system (CJS) and imprisonment. Speaking with the mothers who participated in this research and engaging in ongoing conversations regarding motherhood, racism, misogynoir and processes of marginalisation in the prison system and society more broadly, I have found myself repeatedly returning to the writings of Black feminist and feminist abolitionist scholars for grounding throughout this process (see Davis et al 2022; Kaba and Ritchie 2022). I have become much more critical of the institutions I once understood as inevitable and I have begun to allow myself the space to imagine and advocate for new worlds where Black mothers, their families and wider communities are no longer positioned as being at the intersections of multiple forms of oppression but are cared for by society and are supported in being *free*.

1.3 The Women's Prison Estate

Regarding the criminal justice system of England and Wales, all twelve prisons that make up the women's prison estate are geographically located in England. In this estate, women are categorised as belonging to one of four security categories that being 'Category A', 'Restricted Status', 'Closed Conditions' or 'Open Conditions' (Ministry of Justice 2021a). The Ministry of Justice (2021a:6) states that 'Category A' applies to women who are deemed "highly dangerous ... and for whom the aim must be to make escape impossible", 'Restricted Status' refers to women "whose escape would present a serious risk to the public and who are required to be held in designated secure accommodation", 'Closed Conditions' relates to women for whom "the very highest conditions of security are not necessary but who present too high a risk for open conditions or for whom open conditions are not appropriate" and the classification of 'Open Conditions' are reserved for women who are perceived to "present a low risk; can reasonably be trusted in open conditions and for whom open conditions are appropriate".

Irrespective of these classifications, due to the size of the women's prison estate women are housed in either closed or open conditions, meaning women of different classifications are likely be housed together a direct contrast to the men's prison estate. Out of the twelve women's prisons in England, ten are categorised as closed conditions and two as open conditions. It is also important to distinguish here, that in contrast to closed conditions, where

women classified under 'Category A', 'Restricted Status' or 'Closed Conditions' may be imprisoned, open conditions allow freer movement within the establishment and enable women to temporarily leave prison through periods of Release on Temporary licence (ROTL)². All women begin their prison sentences in closed conditions and as their sentences progress, they *may* become viable for a transfer to open conditions based on the system's classification of their perceived "risk of harm" and likelihood of abscondment (Ministry of Justice 2021:6). According to the Justice Committee (2022:5), there were 3219 women imprisoned in women's prison estate, however it is predicted that this number is likely to increase to "4,500 by September 2026" as a result of the Government's pledge to recruit over 20,000 more police officers. In the following section I focus more closely on statistical data relating to the imprisonment of Black women in the women's prison estate.

1.4 The Representation of Black Women in the Women's Prison Estate

The 2021 census has found that Black women account for 3.9% of the general population in England and Wales (UK Government 2023), a 0.9% increase from the census published in 2011 (Cardale et al 2017). Despite accounting for a relatively low number of the general population Black women were found to represent 8.9% of the women's prison population in 2016³, highlighting their overrepresentation within the prison estate (Cardale et al 2017). However, Agenda and Alliance for Youth Justice (2021) have argued that there are higher levels of racialized disproportionality amongst younger women in prison, as Black women aged 18-24 are said to account for around 10% of the women's prison population. Cardale et al's (2017) research, based on data collected in 2016, also reported that Black⁴ women were the second

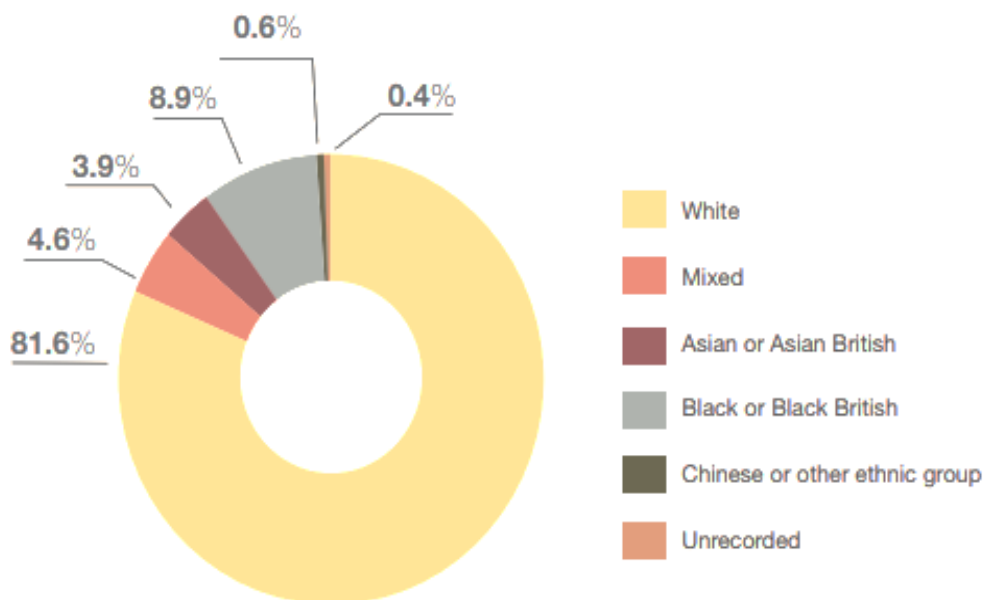
² ROTL refers to the process by which people in prison can temporarily leave for resettlement or other reasons. Child Resettlement licence (CRL) is a form of ROTL that enables parents, who will be responsible for caring for a child under sixteen after their release, to spend time with their child in the community during their prison sentence.

³ There does not appear to be more recent statistical data published that outlines the current percentage of Black women in the women's prison estate as 'race' and 'gender' are often treated as separate variables in most criminal justice research reports. Several more recent publications also rely on data collected and published between 2016 and 2017 when discussing the racialized demographics of the women's prison estate (see for example the Prison Reform Trust 2022 and Working Chance 2021), further demonstrating this gap in published prison data.

⁴ The constructed categories of 'Mixed/multiple ethnic group' and 'Mixed' do not distinguish between the differing racialised or cultural identities of the women classified as belonging to these groups. It is

largest racialized group in the prison estate (see Figure 1) and in one of the few studies that includes detailed statistical data specifically relating to Black women, Uhrig (2016) found Black women were twice more likely to be arrested than White women, 63% more likely to be tried at Crown Court compared to White women and 25% more likely than White women to be sentenced to prison. Therefore, it can be argued that there appears to be a racialised phenomenon of policing, sentencing and imprisonment (see section 3.2). How these rates compared to women from other racialised backgrounds was not explored in the report, as White women were the only comparison group referred to (Uhrig 2016).

Figure 1: Women’s Prison Population in England and Wales (2016)



(Cardale et al 2017:14)

More recently, Black women were identified as having the highest rates of custodial sentences compared to women from all other racialised groups (Ministry of Justice 2020a). The UK Government (2018b) have also recognised that remand is disproportionately used against

therefore unclear how many women identified in this category may consider themselves to have an identity that intersects with Blackness.

Black women, with Black women representing 9% of the women remanded to custody in 2019 (Ministry of Justice 2022). Remand refers to the process by which someone is imprisoned whilst they await trial or sentencing. It is argued to be particularly disruptive and harmful for mothers (see Baldwin 2021), aggravated by the finding that 40% of women on remand who appeared in Crown Court did not go on to receive a custodial sentence, as well as 65% of women, and more specifically 73% of Black women, who appeared in the Magistrates' court (Howard League for Penal Reform 2020). In England and Wales, people classified as Black were also remanded for an average of 302 days in 2022 compared to 262 days for people classified as Asian and 177 days for people classified as White, meaning people classified as Black are confined for 70% longer than people classified as White despite being more likely to be acquitted (Wilding and Syal 2023). The harmful impact of remand is described in a blog post by Lewis (2022: para 7), a Black-mixed-race mother with lived experience of imprisonment, who states "When a woman is remanded to prison, she loses everything that she has — a home, possibly children, and her freedom". Overall, therefore, it is apparent that Black women are disproportionately sentenced, remanded and imprisoned in the penal estate.

Interestingly, however, the rate of women's imprisonment in the criminal justice system of England and Wales is found to be decreasing (Ministry of Justice 2018b; House of Common Justice Committee 2022). In 2000, Black women accounted for 19% of the women's prison population, highlighting a positive 11 percentage point reduction in imprisonment rates over an eighteen-year period (Home Office 2000; Ministry of Justice 2018b). This compares to a general 9% reduction across imprisonment amongst adult women and a 72% reduction for 15–20-year-old women, irrespective of racialised background (Ministry of Justice 2018b). Despite this reduction, in 2021 the British government pledged to create 500 more prison spaces for women (Ministry of Justice 2021b), which is likely to lead to an increase in women's imprisonment (Agenda and Alliance for Youth Justice 2021; see also Justice Committee 2022). It is therefore necessary to acknowledge, in light of the evidence that instances of remand and custodial sentences are used disproportionately against Black women (Ministry of Justice 2018b;2020a), the distinct impact the expansion of the women's prison estate may have on the lives of Black women and their families.

Sudbury (2005) argues that despite the overrepresentation of Black⁵ women in prison populations being a phenomenon that spans across White majority countries such as England, Australia, Canada and America, discussions concerning imprisonment have often ignored the experiences of Black women. It is argued that when the gendered experience of prison is discussed, in relation to its masculine and oppressive nature, it is White women who are largely thought of and talked about (Chigwada-Bailey 2003; Willingham 2011). Additionally, when issues of racialised injustice are considered, it is Black men who are placed at the forefront of these discussions (Willingham 2011). The White woman is privileged by her Whiteness and the Black man is favoured for his masculinity; and so, the Black woman is often ignored due to lacking either of these valued characteristics (Hull et al 1982; Cardale et al 2017). It is necessary to emphasise however that there is a small, and growing, body of literature that has accentuated the prison experiences of Black women in the women's prison estate in England (See Chigwada-Bailey 2003;2004; Sudbury 2005; Davies 2018b; Frazer-Carroll 2019; Motz et al 2020; IMB and CJS 2022; Lady Unchained 2022).

Although the experiences of mothers have not been the specific focus of the literature highlighted above, it is necessary to acknowledge that all of the women who participated in Chigwada-Bailey's (2003) research relating to 'Black women and the criminal justice system' were mothers. Sudbury's (2005) research focused on the experiences of Black women imprisoned in England, America and Canada and also highlights the experiences of mothers. However, both authors seemingly position their overall focus on Black 'womanhood' more broadly, with motherhood being discussed as an aspect of such experiences, rather than a specifically focusing on experiences of Black 'motherhood'. In summary, there does not appear to be academic literature that has *specifically* set out, through a matricentric approach, to acknowledge the experiences of Black *mothers* during and after imprisonment in the women's prison estate in England.

⁵ In Sudbury's (2005: 164) research, her definition of *Black* includes "Black women, women of colour and indigenous women" which differs to the definition of Black conceptualised in this thesis (see section 2.2).

1.5 Foregrounding Black Mothers

According to Pitman and Hull (2021) 56% of the women's prison population in England are *estimated* to be mothers to children under eighteen, highlighting motherhood as a common experience amongst imprisoned women. However, there is no official data that accurately represents how many women in the prison population identify as mothers or how many children are impacted by imprisonment (Minson 2021; Pitman and Hull 2021). As a result, there is no identifiable data relating to the demographics of Black mothers in the women's prison estate in England, or those who have been released. As discussed in section 1.4, there is also very little literature that considers Black mothers' experiences, especially related to mothering, during *as well as* after imprisonment. Consequently, building upon existing understandings of Black women's experiences of imprisonment, this research purposefully foregrounds the narratives of Black mothers. Emphasis is placed on representing their experiences surrounding imprisonment from their own perspectives as shaped by the intersections of their Blackness, femininity and motherhood, as well as other interlocking identities such as but not limited to nationality, sexuality and class. To ensure that the mothers' narratives are given their own space in this thesis, I have positioned their words within quotation marks and represented them using italics so as to distinguish them from my own as well as any academic literature that is drawn upon and quoted.

In this thesis, attention is given to Black mothers' relationships with their children during and after imprisonment (see chapters 5 and 7) and the disruptive and painful impact imprisonment has on such relationships. In keeping with a Black feminist approach to theorising motherhood (see chapter 2), importance is also placed on representing experiences that appeared to exist alongside or in conjunction to mothering relationships. Within their narratives, the mothers did not solely represent themselves as mothers but also, for example, as Black women, as bisexual women, as employees, as students, as wives and partners, friends and activists and all of these intersecting identities are understood in this thesis as part of their experiences as Black mothers. Additionally, as guided by Collins' (1987;1990;1994) Black feminist writing on motherhood explored in detail in section 2.5, mothering, and the *work* associated with mothering, is not only conceptualised as the nurturing of ones' own children in this thesis but also the nurturing of ones' wider family and community.

1.6 Black Feminist Criminology

Whilst taking a purposeful Black feminist and matricentric stance, I have also rooted this thesis within the broader discipline of Black feminist criminological research. According to Potter (2006, p. 110-111), guided by Black feminist thought (see subsection 4.2.2), Black feminist criminology gives attention to “social structural oppression”, Black communities and cultures, “intimate and familial relations” and represents “the Black woman as an individual” from the perspective of Black women themselves. Black feminist criminology encourages a reimagining of the way in which criminology as a discipline, that has historically overlooked, misrepresented and stigmatised Black women’s experiences, theorises the relationship between ‘race’ and ‘gender’, as well as the other intersecting identities that may shape Black women’s experiences of the criminal justice system (Potter 2006; Patterson et al 2016; Angton 2017; Choak 2020; Monde 2022). Importantly, through solely focusing on the narratives of Black mothers, this thesis purposefully detaches itself from criminological research that positions race as nothing more than an independent variable that is used to measure difference, often with Whiteness being used as the overarching standard to which everyone else is compared (see Glynn 2021; Phillips et al 2020; Russell-Brown 2019). By solely focusing on Black mothers’ narratives, as narratives in their own right, this thesis thus provides an informed understanding of the multifaceted and varied ways in which Black mothers interpret, construct and represent their experiences during and after imprisonment.

1.7 Black Feminism and Abolition Feminisms

As mentioned briefly in section 1.2, Black and abolition feminisms are drawn upon throughout this thesis to support an understanding of Black mothers’ experiences of imprisonment and to advocate for new and transformative approaches to justice. Abolitionist perspectives focus on dismantling the prison system, through active processes of ‘decarceration’, whilst *imagining* and building new social systems of care to specifically address the structural inequalities that result in criminalisation, victimisation and harm without relying on punitive and retributive forms of justice (Davis 2003a; Davis et al 2022; Renzulli 2022). It is thus a misconception that abolition is “just about the closing of prisons” (Renzulli 2022:104). Rather, abolition is a long-term political goal that seeks to imagine and build alternatives to punishment (Davis et al 2022; Eschmann et al 2022; Gilmore 2020). It has been argued that the abolitionist agenda differs

from the reformist agenda⁶ in that the “vision for prison abolition ... is less concerned with practicality within the current system, and instead provides a vision for a world in which prisons do not exist” (Eschmann et al 2022: 4). Abolition thus gives privileges imagination in pursuit of liberation (Kaba 2021).

Whilst abolitionists share a vision of a world without prisons and retributive justice, there are some variations in the steps taken towards this eventual goal. For example, pragmatic approaches to abolition often focus attention on reforming conditions of imprisonment as well as reducing or ending the use of custodial sentences, in support of processes of decarceration (Renzulli 2022). Restorative approaches advocate for the use of restorative justice, which focuses on reconciliation, restoration and healing as appropriate responses to harm, in replace of punitive and retributivist approaches (Renzulli 2022). Advocates for transformative justice, underpinned by Marxist theoretical perspectives, aim to eliminate the social and racialised inequalities entrenched within society that are used to rationalise the use of imprisonment and other forms of oppressive control by creating a “continuum of alternatives” to existing modes of punishment that exist outside of the racial capitalist system (Davis 2003:107; Eschmann et al 2022; Gilmore 2020). However, such approaches are often found to overlap with one another within abolitionist writing.

Importantly for this thesis however, prison abolition has often been defined as a “feminist struggle” (Greer 2021, para 9) as processes of harm, criminalisation and imprisonment are shaped by gendered forms of oppression (see section 3.2). Abolition and feminism are thus argued to be interconnected in their pursuit of gendered justice and the *freedom* of women (Davis et al 2022). As Kaba and Ritchie (2022: para 12) summarise, “feminism must be abolitionist and abolition must be feminist”. Abolition has historically been linked to Black feminist theorising and activist organising due to colonial legacies of imprisonment and the disproportionate impact it has in the lives of Black women and their families (Kaba and Ritchie 2022). Black abolitionist feminists Kaba and Ritchie (2022) thus draw upon Black feminist thought and abolition feminisms to recognise and challenge the racialised and gendered

⁶ However, it is important to acknowledge that the strategies and goals of these distinct agendas sometimes overlap with one another.

oppressions experienced by Black women which restrict their access to freedom whilst also providing a “vision for liberation not just for Black women, but for our entire community, and for all who experience oppression”, an approach that has informed this thesis.

Adopting a feminist abolitionist approach also affirms the importance of broadening the focus of abolition to include the structural processes and systems of surveillance that intersect with - and exist beyond - the confines of the prison for women (Greer 2021; Kaba and Ritchie 2022). This includes systems of local authority care, immigration, healthcare and housing, that in response to the mothers’ narratives, are also considered in this thesis alongside the prison system. Black feminist thought and abolition feminisms are thus drawn upon throughout this thesis to support my analysis of the mothers’ narratives in a way that is responsive to the intersections between racialised and gendered marginalisation whilst providing space to *imagine* and advocate for new and transformative approaches to justice.

1.8 Research Design

As the overall aim of this thesis was to foreground the personal narratives of Black mothers in and after prison, it was important that the mothers who chose to be involved were given the space to discuss their subjective experiences, thoughts and feelings and were able to guide the interview in the way that they felt most comfortable with. Qualitative, semi-structured narrative interviews were thus used as the main tool for data production. Between April 2020 and December 2020, I conducted face-to-face one-on-one interviews with four Black mothers who were imprisoned in open conditions. I also conducted virtual one-on-one interviews with five Black mothers in the community who had previous lived experience of imprisonment. The latter interviews took place virtually as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the social distancing guidelines that were introduced during my period of data production (see Chapter Four). Based on a Black feminist narrative analysis of the narratives produced during these conversational interviews, this thesis provides an advanced understanding of Black mothers’ both *personal* and *shared* experiences in and after imprisonment, with an emphasis placed on recognising intersectionality and representing the multifaceted nature such experiences.

1.9 Thesis Overview

In the next Chapter, titled 'Mothering Whilst Black', I provide a contextual background for understanding the processes by which mothering comes to be racialised *specifically* for Black women in the UK – and where relevant, other geographical contexts. To do this, I describe how key definitions such as 'Black' and 'Mothering' are conceptualised in this thesis as underpinned by Black sociological and Black feminist theories. I also consider how theoretical arguments regarding constructions of Black motherhood on a societal level can provide a useful framework for analysing how Black mothering may be understood and experienced in the criminal justice system and more specifically imprisonment.

Focusing more closely on 'Black Mothering and Imprisonment', I then present a critical review of existing 'literature' that has informed the development of this thesis. Throughout this chapter, I weave together literature relating to processes of criminalisation, the pains of imprisonment, gender and race relations in prisons, misogynoir in prisons, the sentencing of Black mothers, the hidden sentences served by children and families, pregnancy and early motherhood, the impact of imprisonment on mothering identities, emotions and experiences, as well as mothering post-release and conceptualisations of imprisoned 'time'. Based on the gaps in knowledge identified in the literature review, I then introduce the research questions underpinning this thesis.

Shifting attention to my methodology, I then explain the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this thesis; that being narrative and Black feminist philosophical approaches to meaning making and knowledge production. I discuss the practical and ethical processes involved in conducting prison-and-community-based research; and detail extensively how the impact of Covid-19 led to the expansion of my research focus from being: 'Black mothers' experiences of imprisonment' to 'Black mothers' experiences *in* and *after* imprisonment'. I also justify my choice of narrative semi-structured interviews and provide introductions to the mothers whose narratives have informed this thesis. In keeping with my epistemological positioning, I reflect upon the importance of situating the mothers' narratives in the contexts in which they were produced and write reflexively about the research process and my

positioning within it. I end the chapter with an outline of my interpretation of a Black feminist narrative analysis which guides the thesis towards the three findings chapters.

Chapter Five, titled 'Imprisoned Mothering', is the first of three findings' chapters. In this chapter I specifically focus on how the mothers conceptualised their mothering identities and experiences in relation to their children and families *during* their imprisonment. This chapter thus supports and adds to the growing body of literature relating to mothering identities and emotions within contexts of imprisonment, with a specific focus on Black mothers' experiences. Repurposing Collins (1994) concept of '*motherwork*' (see section 2.7) as an analytical framework for theorising mothering during imprisonment, in this chapter I also draw attention to the *work* that Black mothers describe themselves and their families having to engage in to mitigate against the reproductive oppression of imprisonment and processes of marginalisation.

I argue that the need for such 'motherwork' is reflective of the social expectations of strength, resilience and independence that have historically positioned Black mothers as personally responsible for protecting themselves, their families and communities in the absence of wider societal care (Collins 1994). To further frame this argument, I loosely draw upon the "umbrella concept" of 'responsibilisation' (Juhila et al 2017: 19). The concept of 'responsibilisation' is often used to describe how individuals in neo-liberal societies become constructed as personally responsible for managing tasks - such as their own safety, protection and survival - while simultaneously absolving state institutions and agencies from such responsibilities (Juhila et al 2017; O'Malley 2009; Rose 1993). Narratives of 'responsibilisation' are reflected in social discourses that emphasise personal choices, actions and decision-making whilst overlooking the socio-structural inequalities that restrict opportunity and individual action (O'Malley 2009).

Within criminological literature, 'responsibilisation' has been used to refer to strategies of crime control that largely position individuals as personally accountable for offending and desistance whilst minimising the role of structural inequality and political constructions of crime (see Garland 1996; Hannah-Moffatt 2001). This is further supported by Rutter and Barr (2021:167) who argue that policy documents relating to women and the criminal justice system often focus on the "responsibilised woman overcoming the hardship she faces" rather than

focusing on the wider societal structures that maintain and perpetuate her marginalisation. However, in this thesis ‘responsibilisation’ is used to refer to the racialised and gendered processes that render Black mothers individually accountable for mitigating against their marginalisation, reflecting social and sometimes internalised expectations of the ‘*super strong*’ and resilient Black mother (see section 2.7.2), whilst minimising or absolving the role of the state.

In chapter six, drawing upon Sykes’ (1958) ‘*the pains of imprisonment*’ framework, I then contribute an advanced understanding of ‘The [Racialised] Pains of [Maternal] Imprisonment’, as experienced by Black mothers. Guided by the mothers’ narratives, I refer to these pains as ‘*The Pains of Marginalisation*’, ‘*The Pains of Discrimination*’ and ‘*The Pains of Appeasement*’. In this chapter, I also introduce the concepts of ‘*Stretched*’ and ‘*Sticky*’ notions of time, relating to the temporal and textured nature of Black mothers’ racialised experiences of imprisonment. However, throughout the chapter emphasis is placed on the multifaceted nature of Black mothers’ experiences and I pay close attention to understanding the different ways in which ‘race’ is narrated, conceptualised and understood as well as how other intersecting identities may be seen to shape or impact experience.

In the third and final findings chapter, I consider how the impacts of imprisonment are experienced as extending beyond the prison walls through detailing the mothers’ experiences, or expectations, of life after their release from prison. In this chapter, titled ‘Life After Prison’, I analyse how the oppression of imprisonment was often experienced as intersecting with other and forms of marginalisation towards the end of a prison sentence or in the community after release. Again, drawing upon Collins’ (1994) concept of motherwork, I further add to existing literature, based in America, focused on the strategies utilised by Black mothers to protect and nurture their children, families and communities following their release from prison (see also Gurusami 2019) with an emphasis placed on strategies of “*building*” (Sharon) and rebuilding. Attention is again given to how such narratives of resilience also reveal wider processes of ‘responsibilisation’ that render Black mothers individually accountable for ensuring the protection and survival of themselves, their children, and wider communities after their imprisonment, in the absence of necessary consideration and care from the state.

I conclude, by highlighting the key contributions that this thesis makes to four main theoretical arguments and conceptual frameworks that being ‘reproductive oppression’, ‘the pains of imprisonment’, ‘motherwork’ and ‘responsibilisation’ as well as its theoretical and methodological contribution to the further development of an ‘Black feminist Criminology’. I acknowledge the limitations of this research, discuss some potential ideas for future research and provide a summary of recommendations for future policy and practice. Based on the arguments made throughout the findings’ chapters, this thesis concludes with a reflective discussion focused on abolition. This discussion reaffirms the importance of Black feminist abolitionist perspectives to advocate for new ways of addressing inequality, harm, and violence, that do not rely on existing systems of criminal justice that exacerbate oppression and enable injustice.

1.10 Summary of Key Contributions to Knowledge

By valuing and platforming Black mothers’ narratives, this thesis provides a nuanced understanding of the both *personal* and *collective* ways that Black mothers narrate and make sense of their experiences of imprisonment and life after release. This specific focus on the experiences of Black mothers evidences the importance of furthering the development of a ‘Black feminist criminology’ (see Potter 2006) that is responsive to the unique histories, experiences and perspectives of women racialised as Black in Britain. Through positioning ‘race’ as a social construct this thesis also demonstrates how to meaningfully engage with subjective narratives produced by Black mothers in a way that does not necessitate the use of ‘Whiteness’ as an overarching standard of comparison and allows for the nuance and fluidity of racialised identity to be acknowledged and incorporated throughout the research process. This thesis thus contributes an understanding of the complex and multifaceted ways in which processes of racialisation appear to shape Black mothers’ narratives of imprisonment and life after release, whilst also recognising such narratives as subjective and valuable sources of knowledge in their own right.

In regard to its key theoretical contributions, this thesis highlights the multiple ways in which imprisonment stands in opposition to reproductive justice due to its inherently oppressive and punitive nature. Through what I term ‘the racialised pains of maternal imprisonment’, this

thesis identifies how such reproductive oppression often intersects with racialised forms of marginalisation for Black mothers; a finding that has not been explored in the existing literature relating to the maternal pains of imprisonment. Through reworking Collins' (1990) Black feminist concept of 'motherwork' and building upon Gurusami's (2019) framework of 'decarcerated motherwork', this thesis also presents a new typology of 'imprisoned motherwork' that distinguishes between the different strategies of resistance utilised by the mothers before, during and after imprisonment to mitigate against such oppression.

In keeping with a Black feminist approach, this thesis thus adopts a broad definition of 'mothering' to recognise and include community and 'activist' forms of motherwork that occur outside of the boundaries of 'traditionally' Westernised constructions of motherhood, providing a new approach for conceptualising experiences of mothering and imprisonment. However, this thesis also evidences the complex relationship between responsibility and resilience reflected in the mothers' narratives of motherwork. It reveals how through racialised and gendered processes of 'responsibilisation', Black mothers often experience a heightened sense of pressure to cope in the face of adversity whilst simultaneously being overlooked, unprotected and marginalised by state. Guided by existing sociological literature (see section 2.7.2), therefore, this thesis adds to an awareness of how the stereotypes that surround Black femininity and mothering within British society come to be experienced within - and heightened by - the criminal justice system.

In the chapter that follows, academic literature relating to the social and political construction of Black mothering and motherhood in society more broadly will be reviewed to provide a theoretical basis for conceptualising and understanding Black mothers' experiences of imprisonment and life after release.

Chapter Two

Mothering Whilst Black

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I illustrate some of the different ways *Black mothering* is discussed in academic literature as being experienced in Britain and, where relevant, countries in Africa, the Caribbean and North America. I begin the chapter by providing an initial interpretation of the meaning of 'Black' in the context of this research, although, understandings of Blackness are continually negotiated and re-negotiated throughout the entirety of this thesis. Following this, I briefly discuss the relationship between 'race' and 'nationalism' and the consequences of this for *new racisms*. I then go on to define what is meant by 'mothering', with emphasis placed on culturally contextualising its meaning. Building upon this, I explore arguments surrounding collective mothering and social constructions of Black femininity and the distribution of responsibilities. I then reflect upon the impact that negative stereotypes regarding Black femininity and motherhood can have on shaping the experiences and treatment of Black mothers in wider society and subsequently the criminal justice system of England and Wales. In the final section, I outline the theoretical framework of 'motherwork' that underpins much of this thesis.

In relation to the sources cited, it was considered essential *throughout* this thesis to incorporate knowledge produced outside of academia through an engagement with mediums such as blog posts, magazine articles, third sector reports and poetry. There is consequently a purposeful move away from colonial understandings of 'scientific rigour' and 'truth' to emphasise value found in other forms of meaning making. Drawing upon the works of Collins (1998), Kuumba (1999) and Zerai and Salime (2006) it is also noted many Black women are not present within academic spaces due to barriers in the education system. This issue is also exacerbated for Black women with lived experiences of imprisonment who seem to be less visible within academic circles than other social spheres. Broadening the scope of sources thus "helps address the problem of the missing and faulty examination of Black women's lives within academia" (Zerai and Salime 2006:503).

2.2 'Black'

Whenever 'race' is discussed in this thesis it is done so under the premise that racialised differences are *not* biologically determined but are reflections of societal constructs, understandings, and political agendas that have resulted in meaning being ascribed to physical and cultural characteristics such as, but not limited to, skin colour (Hall 1997). In this thesis, I conceptualise the term 'Black' as a socially constructed, racialised category that is used to describe people, belonging to the African diaspora, who may share common histories, ancestries and collective memories (see Du Bois, 1911, cited in Hall 1997). Blackness here, is thus not seen as monolithic, but rather as complex, multifaceted and able to take many forms. As Adebisi (2019, np) stresses "Black has no meaning but the meaning we give it" and the meaning of Blackness is negotiated and re-negotiated throughout this thesis in light of the mothers' narratives.

To be defined or to self-define as Black has meaning in our society. 'Race' matters, as you cannot discuss racism – that is the prejudice, discrimination and structural disadvantage experienced by people racialised as 'Non-White'⁷ who have historically been constructed as inferior in 'Western' societies - without first acknowledging the socio-political construction of race. By foregrounding the experiences of mothers racialised as Black, this research sets out to provide a detailed and contextualised understandings of Black identities and the ways that these may shape lived experiences of mothering during imprisonment. Note, when using terms such as '*Black mothers*', I am referring to the processes of racialisation that have come to define them as such, with the understanding they are not Black mothers in any natural sense, but rather mothers who have come to be racialised as Black. This reasoning applies to my descriptions of all racialised groups throughout this thesis.

2.3 'Black [And] British'

Political meanings assigned to Blackness are entangled with, and inseparable from, constructions of citizenship and belonging which have consequences for both Black people

⁷ Note, the term 'Non-White' refers to the political construction of racial categorisation and racialised othering rather than a reference to actual skin colour. However, skin colour is often – although not solely - used as a means of justifying processes of racialisation.

born in Britain, as well as Black people living in Britain. Gilroy (2002:46) recalls how during the 1970s the term 'Black' was often constructed as being synonymous with the word 'immigrant', a sentiment that remains in the British nationalist imagination today. He subsequently argues that as political constructions of 'race' in Britain are underpinned by notions of "national belonging and homogeneity" there is a blurring of the concepts of race and nation, and it is this very indistinctness that enables its maintenance (Gilroy 2002:46). As Noronha (2019:2414) states: "the claim that the exclusion of immigrants has nothing to do with race is central to the justification for bordering in contemporary Britain." Through political discourses, people classified legally as 'migrants', as well as people classified as such on the basis of skin colour, become constructed as threats to Britishness itself, "strangers... [who] symbolise all the difficulties involved in the countries grudging marginalisation" (Gilroy 2002:xxvi). Gilroy (2002:45) thus posits that in Britain there is a "New Racism" which is preoccupied with enforcing means of inclusion and exclusion, justified by the belief that some people belong whilst others don't.

The ideologies of 'New Racisms' are argued to be reflected in the overrepresentation of Black people in the criminal justice system (Gilroy 2002; Noronha 2020), the hostile treatment of the 'Windrush generation' and their descendants (see Hewitt 2020; Reynolds 2020), the treatment of Black deportees many of whom have grown up in Britain and identify as British (see Noronha 2020) and can also arguably be seen in new Nationality and Borders Bill which attempts to 'toughen' entry to Britain and more easily remove people who come to be seen as a threat to British society (see House of Commons 2021). Understanding processes of 'New Racisms' is thus essential for contextualising the experiences of Black imprisoned mothers as imprisonment itself, through its disproportionate impact on Black people, can be understood as a racialised means of exclusion (Gilroy 2002). Whilst these sections have considered meanings of Blackness in Britain, in the following section I explore definitions of mothering.

2.4 'Mothering'

The social roles of 'woman' and 'mother' have traditionally been constructed as indivisibly bound with, and dependent upon, one another (Chodorow 1978; Davidson and Gordon 1979; Gillespie 2000). The gendered expectations associated with the role of woman are reflected in the assumptions of what it means to be a mother, with both roles reinforcing and legitimising

an adequate performance of the other (Reynolds 2005). However, femininity and motherhood are not fixed universal concepts and can have different meanings depending upon the social, historical and cultural environments in which they are situated (Phoenix 1997; Collins 1987;1990; Reynolds 2009a; Gillespie 2003; Reynolds 2020). Considering the way that femininity is constructed and enacted in wider society thus provides a basis for formulating an understanding of the identities, relationships and ideals associated with mothering and womanhood within more specific social contexts (Reynolds 2009b). When considering Black mothers' identities and experiences surrounding imprisonment in England, therefore, it is essential to adopt a perspective that acknowledges the "cultural variations, functionality and validity of Black family lifestyles" (Peters 1997:167). Throughout this thesis, Black mothers are positioned and understood in light of their own cultural values, ideals and experiences and it is recognised that such experiences will not be monolith but will vary in relation to the differing contexts and circumstances of each mother's life (Collins 1990; Reynolds 2020).

2.5 Collective Mothering

Academic literature focused on Black mothering and family life commonly highlights how a wide range of family members and sometimes community members often come together to provide networks of socialisation, financial support, "emotional support" and "mutual aid" for one another (Collins 1987; Hill 1998; Kperogi 2015; Reynolds 2003; Sudarkasa 1980:44). This extensive view of the family is found to be reflected in household living arrangements as substantiated by Simey (2012:12) who conducted research across 270 Jamaican households and found that every single one "included additional children and adults variously described as nephews, grandsons, stepsons, cousins, aunties" (Simey 2012:191). This is also prevalent in my own familial experiences, with my mother being looked after in several households before moving to Britain to live with her grandmother following the death of her parents; while I grew up in a household with my mother, father, brother and also my cousin who came to live with us from Jamaica.

Within this collective network, mothering is often understood as shared practice distributed amongst the women in the household and/or community (Collins 1987). This is reflected in Nigerian English dialect where the word 'mother' can be used to describe close aunties or

respected elderly women living within the community whilst the word 'auntie' is commonly assigned to a larger network of women available to provide care and support⁸ (Kperogi 2015). Research by Reynolds (2003) concerning Black Caribbean parenting practices in Britain acknowledges how mothering is not always limited to the biological mother or parent of children, rather it is common for Black women to share the responsibility of raising children within their extended families and networks. This practice of caring for children across extended-familial-networks is described by Collins (1990;1994) as 'Othermothering'. Mothering is thus constructed as a "collective and connected space" and is not necessarily exclusive to the private sphere of a single household or individual family (Reynolds 2020:3; Sudarkasa 1980; Goulbourne 2010;).

In Reynolds' (2005:38) research based on interviews with forty Black mothers she discusses the practice of "child shifting" within Black British Caribbean families. Child-shifting concerns the practice of parents shifting the responsibility of child-rearing to members of their extended family or friends either temporarily or permanently with the purpose of caring for the child (Reynolds 2005; Bauer and Thompson 2006). This practice is also found across a number of Black African communities; with 'transnational mothering', happening both within countries and between countries as a response to economic marginalisation (See Hall and Posel 2019; Madziva and Zontini 2012). Maternal economic migration is cited as one of the reasons for engaging in transnational mothering, and this refers to a mother moving away for work opportunities whilst her children remain in her hometown or country (Reynolds 2005). The mother may then return to her old home or 'send' for her children to join her in her new home once she has the resources to do so. Other reasons highlighted by Barrow (2008:24) suggest that child-shifting, or transnational mothering may take place "because a child needs to be protected or placed where there is more money or opportunity".

Madziva and Zontini (2012) highlight the experiences of Zimbabwean mothers seeking asylum in Britain whose 'transnational mothering' practices are a necessary response to forced

⁸ This section focuses specifically on the gendered role of mothering within extended-family networks however the masculine performance of fathering is also considered a collective responsibility with the terms 'father', 'uncle' and 'brother' being used in very similar ways to that of 'mother', 'auntie' and 'sister' (Kperogi 2015).

migration and similarly to literature relating to imprisoned mothering (see Chapter Three), ‘transnational mothers’ are described as developing strategies for remaining emotionally connected to their children and involved in their care whilst separated. However, whilst extended-familial networks and collective approaches to mothering may be common it must be recognised that this is not a deterministic model and there will be many different experiences of, and approaches to, family life depending on differing identities and cultural as well as classed or religious practices/preferences (Reynolds 2005), with many Black mothers in contemporary Britain not having shared this experience. Nonetheless, these existing bodies of literature are useful for understanding the ways in which Black mothers have historically responded to maternal separation as well as economic marginalisation and the networks and mothering strategies that exist to ensure the continued day-to-day care of their children. Regarding this thesis, therefore, such literature provides insight into the existing and extended networks of support that may be available to Black mothers and their children during and following a period of maternal imprisonment.

2.6 Black Femininity and Responsibility

“I don’t see them as separate things – I work so I can be a mother.”
(Zora, a Black mother, in Reynolds 2001:1054)

Economically providing for one’s family has traditionally been represented within ‘Western’ societies as generally being men’s work (Bradley 2007; Reynolds 2001; 2005). Historically, however, such constructions have not been applied to all women with certain groups being excluded as necessary exceptions to the rule. Black feminist Collins (1987) argues that the segregation of gender roles, which renders the woman economically dependent upon her male partner, is largely based upon Eurocentric, heteronormative and patriarchal standards of femininity, masculinity and parenthood. The belief that women belong within the familial home maintains an idealised version of White middle and upper classed femininity; reliant upon domesticity, subservience and passivity (Jaggar 1983; Phoenix 1997). However, the depiction of Black femininity within such discourses as something strong, active and assertive has often resulted in Black women being considered especially fit for work outside of their familial home (Chigwada-Bailey 2003; Phoenix 1997; Reynolds 2001;2005).

The centrality of paid work within the lives of Black mothers is argued to be “a consequence of Black women’s status under slavery, British colonialism... and [the] economic migration of Black women to Britain”, all of which are connected by the social construction of Black women as particularly suited for work (Reynolds 2001:1049). In the Caribbean during slavery the majority⁹ of women were expected to work in the fields alongside men; with the labour force being decided by perceptions of “strength and endurance” (Reynolds 2005:98; Senior 1991). American literature has also highlighted how for mothers who were enslaved, forced labour within the fields often meant either having to leave their babies on the ground whilst they worked, carrying their babies with them, or leaving their babies in the care of older children or the elderly (Davis 1981). Some women, predominately those with lighter skin, were expected to work within the homes of affluent families, caring for their children and carrying out other domestic duties demonstrating how Black women’s experiences are not monolith (Collins 1990; Goulbourne 2010). Black women were thus depended upon to fulfil the role of the subservient mother within other women’s homes rather than their own; a practice that often continues post-slavery due to financial necessity (Chigwada-Bailey 2003; Reynolds 2005).

Alternative arguments suggest that the overlapping of gender roles within some Black families are traceable back to pre-colonial West-African customs (DuBois 1908). Africanist perspectives conclude that the blurring of public and private spheres within the contemporary Black family is an insight into aspects of African cultures which have been sustained despite slavery and colonialism (DuBois 1908). Such arguments have since been critiqued for failing to consider the vast cultural and structural differences between and within African countries (Rath 1997). To suggest African family values have survived slavery is to reduce Africa to “one idea and one land” as Du Bois (1947:6) later reflected upon. It is therefore important to acknowledge the possibility of differences between countries and communities when talking about the values, practices and beliefs linked to particular continents.

⁹Reynolds (2005:7) highlights in the Caribbean a small class of affluent “creole, brown and Black” women did not work and structured their households using traditionally patriarchal approaches to family life. These women’s husbands were thus responsible for economically supporting the household and poorer Black women were hired to carry out the housework as well as child-rearing responsibilities. Class therefore also shapes the construction and performance of femininity emphasising the importance of adopting an intersectional approach to contextualising Black mothers’ experiences.

Following on from slavery, colonialisation and the creation of the commonwealth, migration also acted to maintain the ideal of the Black working woman and mother in Britain (Miles 1989; Reynolds 2001; Webster 2012). During labour shortages post Second World War, the British government encouraged members of the commonwealth, especially those from the Caribbean and Ireland, to migrate to Britain to reestablish the effective running of their public services (Hewitt 2020; Reynolds 2005; Webster 2012). Such people, often referred to as the Windrush¹⁰ generation, including my great grandmother, were constructed by the British government as functional sources of low and semi-skilled cheap labour (Hewitt 2020; Reynolds 2005). Black women entering the country following the war, a significant number of whom were mothers, therefore did so in pursuit of opportunities for paid full-time work and obtained jobs within sectors such as the National Health Service, public transport and manufacturing industries (Harper 2010; Reynolds 2005).

An engagement with these types of jobs challenged mainstream ideals of motherhood in Britain, which at that time positioned good mothering identities as being primarily dependent on mothers being based within the home, taking care of domestic duties and nurturing their children (Reynolds 2005). The notion that Black mothers were fit for, or able to partake in jobs, outside of their own home reinforced ideas about Black femininity as being something very different from ideals surrounding hegemonic and middle-classed White femininity at that time. Arguably, these ideals have continued to impact the way Black mothering may be perceived and experienced in the context of Britain for both British-born Black women and Black women who have migrated to Britain. Scholars such as Chigwada-Bailey (2003) and Davis (1981), for example, argue that the disproportionate representation of Black women in prison may reflect the legacy of these differentially racialised representations of motherhood that have historically positioned Black mothers as particularly suited for life outside of the home and away from their children, as explored further in section 2.8 as well as in Chapter Three.

¹⁰ The treatment of the Windrush generation and their descendants in contemporary British society will be discussed further in the final findings chapter (see section 7.2).

2.7 The Marginalisation of Black Mothers

“The myth of the Good Mother is built on the back of scorn for mothers like me. There’s no reckoning with this myth, no challenging it, without recognising this. Being expected to embody “traditional” femininity, it turns out, is its own strange sort of privilege”
(Charlton 2014:177)

In her magazine post, Charlton (2014) argues that the assumed fiery and aggressive nature of Black women is often used as a means of branding them unfeminine in societies where traditionally White, patriarchal, middle and upper classed hegemonic conceptions of a weak and submissive femininity is often constructed as the societal standard by those in power. The Black woman becomes deemed as a failure due to her inability to meet expectations of ‘true womanhood’ and so she is penalised not only as an inadequate feminine form but also as an inadequate mother; with both identities depending upon the other for legitimisation (Collins 1990). As a result, Black mothers are surrounded by multiple stereotypes which act to delegitimise their experiences as both women and mothers whilst also simultaneously justifying their subordination within ‘Western’ society (Collins 1990).

It is acknowledged that the marginalisation of mothering practices is not exclusive to Black mothers and can be found regarding women belonging to many cultural, classed, aged and sexual identities who are constructed as deviating from the dominant ideology of motherhood (Gillies 2007; Rock 2007). However, this section focuses specifically on the marginalisation of motherhood in relation to constructions of Blackness whilst also considering how many aspects of Black women’s lives may intersect¹¹ to shape their lived experiences (Crenshaw 1989; Crenshaw 1991). Through introducing the stereotypes of the ‘*babymother*’ and the ‘*superwoman*’, the subsections below support an understanding of the wider social discourses that may impact the ways in which Black mothers are constructed and subsequently treated in the criminal justice system as well as after a period of imprisonment.

2.7.1 The Babymother

According to Reynolds (1997; 2005:31) the British media is fixated upon reporting the breakdown of the Black family and often reproduces the stereotype of the “babymother”,

¹¹ Crenshaw (1991) developed the term intersectionality to refer to the multiple forms of marginalisation experienced by Black women relating constructions of race, gender and class.

which has also frequently been used in America (See also Collins 1990) to characterise the perceived failure of Black mothers. The babymother is depicted as a single mother who is tasked with raising her children by herself, she is also represented within the media to be uneducated, unemployed and sexually promiscuous (Reynolds 2005). She is consequently characterised as depending upon state welfare for financial support and is criticised for not being able to provide for her children. Due to her unemployment the babymother is also vilified for spending too much time within the home and it is this physical closeness with her children which is assumed to be problematic due to the fear her children may replicate her behaviour (Collins 1990). She is thus blamed not only for her own actions but also for the potential or actual actions of her children (See also Laskin 2000). This scorn of the babymother arguably reinforces the idea that Black women are expected to work and economically contribute to the benefit of both their families and wider society whilst the reproduction of the stereotype *also* results in the disguising of the experiences and existence of the Black middle class.

The emphasis on single motherhood within the babymother trope, weaponises and further stigmatises common experiences of single motherhood amongst Black women *in Britain*. It also ignores how for Black women shared parenting dynamics are often highly valued and desired despite not being the most common formation for Black families in Britain (Reynolds 2005). For example, around the time of Reynolds' (2005) writing, the Runnymede Trust (2009) found that 44% of Black African and 59% of Black Caribbean children in Britain were raised in single-parent households compared to 22% of the national average. Black mothers in Britain were also reportedly slightly more likely to be single parents than they were likely to be in married, cohabiting, or 'other' parenting relationships (UK Government 2011). In 2021, 51% of people who identified as 'Black' and 85.6% of those who identified as women also described themselves as 'lone parents', seemingly highlighting the continued relevance of such discussions (Office for National Statistics 2023). However, it has been suggested that the category of 'single mother' – or 'lone parent' - is reductionist and does not account for more nuanced parenting dynamics (Reynolds 2005).

Powell's (1986) definition of a "visiting" union developed through questionnaires with 1545 women in the Caribbean, recognises familial structures where the father does not live at home with the mother but regularly spends time with the household. However, based on

classifications in Britain a mother may identify, or be identified, as a 'single' mother if her experiences do not fit neatly into the ascribed boxes of 'married' or 'cohabiting'. Regarding Black mothering and imprisonment, this literature provides a contextual background for considering the disproportionate impact that single motherhood and the harmful stereotypes that surround it may have on shaping Black mothers' experiences during and after imprisonment. It also stresses the importance of acknowledging and representing the *nuance* that may characterise the parenting dynamics of Black women who identify as single mothers in this research.

Additionally, as the structure of the nuclear family is based upon a White middle-and-upper-classed distribution of resources, families who do not fit in with this model may be made more vulnerable to facing economic marginalisation within society. In England and Wales, nearly half of all single-parent families live in relative poverty and 75% of single-parent families have either no savings or savings less than £1000 compared to 35% of adults in the UK more broadly (Gingerbread 2023). Therefore, for Black working-class single mothers, societies treatment of their interlocking racialised, gendered, and classed identities may result in unique experiences of oppression for such women (Crenshaw 1989; Crenshaw 1991). Both Moore (2008) and Meghji (2017) suggest that racialisation shapes the way that class is experienced in the same way that class influences experiences of racialisation. However, the social condemnation of the 'babymother' does not acknowledge the intersecting oppressions that Black mothers may face within society and instead trivialises and shames such experiences. The term can, therefore, be seen to be highly reductionist as it restricts single motherhood to one singular and highly damaging narrative. This is described by Harris (2011:1), a Black single mother, who argues that the term babymother:

... doesn't give any single mother's story validity or credit, as a matter of fact. It just dumps a whole heap of assumptions about a woman into her lap and lets society at large basically poke fun and pass judgment about her failed romance or precarious situation.

Importantly, the babymother is not the only stereotype that is argued to shape mainstream representations of Black mothering. Another stereotype of Black motherhood is that of the

“super(wo)man” (Reynolds 1997; Collins 1990; Reynolds 2005:31; Adegoke and Uviebinene 2018, p.301), as detailed in the next subsection.

2.7.2 *The Superwoman*

Unlike the babymother, the image of the superwoman arose out of a Black feminist critique surrounding existing stereotypes of Black motherhood. The image of the superwoman attempts to represent Black mothers who fulfil the dual roles of nurturers and economic providers within their families; often in the absence of their Black male partners who are also damagingly portrayed as absent and uncaring fathers (Reynolds 2005). Superwomen are seen as educated and/or work full-time jobs whilst also raising their children and maintaining their family home. The Black superwoman is seen as a resilient and strong mother who, in the face of adversity, makes up for the irresponsible and neglectful actions of her children’s father.

Despite this narrative often being accepted and celebrated by the public and academics and under the guise of Black women’s empowerment, it is argued to be problematic and detrimental for several reasons (Reynolds 1997; Overstreet 2019). Firstly, the Black superwoman narrative places value upon the Black mother but in doing so it also devalues the Black man (Reynolds 1997). The depiction of strong and powerful Black femininity thus becomes dependent upon the subjugation of Black masculinity. As a result, images within the media that show Black mothers and fathers raising and providing for their children together are glossed over and ignored resulting in such circumstances being deemed unlikely in the mainstream public imagination. The fabricated notion of the Black superwoman within the media and public conscious also downplays issues of poverty (Reynolds 1997).

In 2021, Black people in Britain were more likely to be employed within occupations associated with lower socio-economic status (UK Government 2022a). However, it is important to note, that income and job status does not simply reflect skill or educational background but also wider processes of racism and marginalisation (see McGregor 2007). Additionally, Black women were also found to represent 11% of unemployment in amongst women Britain, that

being the second highest¹² rate for women (UK Government 2022b). Defining a woman as a “super strong Black mother” may thus render her lived experiences invisible by assuming, without asking, that she is either coping or she is at least “happy for her sacrifices” (Collins 1990:117).

Nelson et al (2016) found that 77% of the Black American women who took part in their research identified as ‘strong super women’ and it was further identified that for these women admitting weakness or asking for help was difficult due to the social expectations placed upon them. Adegoke and Uviebinene’s book on the experiences of Black women in Britain, in which they speak to forty women from a wide range of backgrounds, supports this argument as highlighted in the author Yomi Adegoke’s (2018:299) personal reflection:

Admitting I might have depression felt like I would have been admitting defeat, succumbing to failure in a culture that preached strongly about the importance of success.

The notion of the Black superwoman does not leave space for Black women to be vulnerable and so the label may actually restrict Black women, rather than fulfilling the intended goal of liberation (Adegoke and Uviebinene 2018; Aniefuna et al 2020). Applauding Black power and rewarding Black excellence is only constructive if it is not at the expense of masking Black struggle and Black discontent.

Additionally, through their Black feminist criminological research relating to Black mothers’ experiences of police surveillance, Aniefuna et al (2020) argue that whilst Black women’s resilience is often attributed to strength and independence, displays of resilience are almost always accompanied by heightened feelings of pressure, stress and pain. They go on to highlight how the social responsibility placed upon Black mothers to act as the “backbone and martyrs of their communities”, a phenomenon explored further in section 2.9, thus “comes at a tremendous cost because they remain largely unprotected and subject to immeasurable institutional violence” (Aniefuna et al 2020:356). When beginning to think about Black

¹² Pakistani and Bangladeshi women were found to have the highest rates of unemployment amongst women at a rate of 12% (UK Government 2022b)

mothers' experiences of imprisonment in England, therefore, it is important to consider the impact that social expectations of resilience – as well as a lack of protection by the state - may have on how they experience their mothering responsibilities in and after imprisonment as well as the construction of their narratives. Such considerations are framed throughout this thesis in relation to racialized and gendered processes of 'responsibilisation' (see O'Malley 2009) that are argued to result in Black mothers being positioned as responsible for managing their own care, protection and survival (see section 8.3.4).

The final critique of the superwoman narrative is the assumption that, due to the unequal balancing of her responsibility to motherhood as well as paid work, she is an inadequate and neglectful mother. Unlike the baby mother who is looked down upon for spending too much time within the home, the superwoman is vilified for spending too much time outside of it (Collins 1990). Black mothers, under the superwoman narrative, are thus blamed for failing to supervise their children and guide them along the 'right social path' (Elliott and Reid 2016). Subsequently, when problems or harms arise surrounding Black children, it is often Black mothers who are held accountable and judged (Collins 1990; Elliott and Reid 2016)

In her book titled 'Black women's experiences of criminal justice: A discourse on disadvantage', based on interviews with 20 Black women, who were either in prison or who had past experience of imprisonment, Chigwada-Bailey (2003) emphasises how the stereotyping of Black mothers as '*bad mothers*' is likely to shape how they are responded to in the criminal justice system. For example, she notes that:

An African woman who arranges with some members of her extended family to care for her children while she spends many hours at the market... may not be seen in English courts as a 'good' mother who cares for them... because they fail to measure up to the dominant (White) ideology of motherhood (Chigwada-Bailey 2003:39).

The criminal justice system is thus argued to marginalise Black mothers through the delegitimisation of Black mothering identities (Chigwada-Bailey 2003; Aniefuna et al 2020). Exploring this argument further, I now move on to consider the harmful consequences of stereotypes associated with Black mothering in more detail.

2.8 The Impacts of Marginalisation

Mitchell and Davis (2019:423) acknowledge that since slavery, Black women have often had to mother “under the most extreme deprivations” and have “historically... had to struggle to be allowed to mother” (see also Davis 1981; Hayes et al 2020). The devaluing and reprimanding of Black mothering is also argued to have a colonial legacy, with Black maternal separation during colonial and imperialist subjugation across Africa often being used as a means of state violence under the guise of ‘protecting’, ‘educating’ and ‘civilising’ Black children (See Ekin 2021 and Koonar 2014). The stereotyping of “Black maternal unfitness” is arguably still reflected within contemporary policies and practices associated with social systems of care and punishment which have disproportionate impacts on Black women and their families (Roberts 2012:1486). Research by Roberts (2012:1486), conducted in America, also highlights how Black women are often labelled as “hostile”, “aggressive”, “angry” and “loud” within dominant social discourses and such stereotypes impact their treatment within both local authority care and prison systems. She goes on to suggest that both prison and the local authority care systems blame and punish Black mothers, a disproportionately economically disadvantaged group as a result of racial capitalism¹³, for their lack of resources rather than providing support and financial subsidy (Roberts 2012; Roberts 2019; Hayes et al 2020).

In an earlier study, Owen and Statham (2009) found that in England Black children were overrepresented within the local authority care system and as being in need but were not overrepresented in relation to the child protection register, raising questions surrounding the parameters of protection. Such disparities were argued to be the result of a lack of support for Black families before children being taken into care (Owen and Statham 2009:1). A lack of support was considered as occurring for several reasons such as: a wariness of social services amongst Black families meaning they were less likely to ask for help and a lack of cultural awareness amongst social workers preventing an effective response to the needs of Black families (Owen and Statham 2009). Black children were also identified as only being 9-12%

¹³ Racial capitalism refers to the ways in which capitalism as a process depends on the construction and reproduction of racial hierarchies. Racism and inequality are therefore entangled with capitalism, and each rely on one another for their maintenance (Robinson 1983; Gilmore 2020).

likely to be returned home¹⁴ after time in care, compared to the national average of 18% (Owen and Statham 2009). It was suggested that a better understanding between social services and Black mothers was needed but the authors gave little consideration to the impact of institutional racist policies and practices (Owen and Statham 2009).

More recently, Bywaters et al (2017) also conducted quantitative research into both classed and racialised disparities within the care system. Similar, to Owen and Statham (2009) they found that that children racialised as Black were overrepresented in local authority care (rates were 10% higher than children racialised as White) and underrepresented in child protection (rates were 20% lower than children racialised as White). Children racialised as Black Caribbean were also more likely to be in care than children racialised as Black African (Bywaters et al 2017). They concluded “that both racial and economic structures, and their interaction, are of central significance” for understanding patterns of intervention (Bywaters et al 2017:1898). Overall, therefore, both the prison and care systems appear to further marginalise Black mothers and their families who are disproportionately economically disadvantaged in British society and whose Blackness is used to position them as *other* (Roberts 2012; Carter and Willoughby-Herard 2018; Reynolds 2020).

It is acknowledged, however, that the marginalisation of Black mothers also has harmful consequences across other institutional settings such as perinatal healthcare and mental health care which often interact with experiences of imprisonment and will be explored in more detail in Chapter Three as well as the Findings chapters. Feminist abolitionists Davis et al (2022) thus argue that we must begin to dismantle existing systems of oppression and start to imagine and create new approaches to harm. These new approaches should be based on transformative forms of justice rooted in safety, care and healing, an argument that I will further engage with throughout this thesis.

¹⁴ Despite low rates of reunification children racialised as Black were also identified, along with children with Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage, as having the lowest rates of adoption.

2.9 Motherwork

“...When it comes to Black mothers, resistance is rooted in strategies that are employed for survival” (Brady 2022: 158)

In order to describe how Black mothers have historically responded to experiences of marginalisation often in the absence of wider systematic support, Collins (1994) draws upon the term ‘motherwork’. She states that for Black women, motherwork is underpinned by “issues of survival, power and identity” (Collins 1994:374). It encompasses the work Black women do to ensure the survival of their children and communities, the role of power or powerlessness within their experiences of mothering and the nurturing of collective racialised identities for their children and communities (Collins 1994; Brady 2022). Motherwork thus occurs at the intersections of financial, political and social marginalisation and attempts to theorise how “suffering and resistance [can] happen side by side” (Schmalzbauer et al 2007:46). Schmalzbauer et al (2007) state that motherwork includes an expansive range of activities including engaging in paid work, working multiple jobs, arranging childcare with community and familial networks and safeguarding children from harm, all of which represent purposive strategies for mothering and resistance.

Within her definition, Collins (1994:373) also argues that the concept of motherwork contests the assumed distinction between the private and the public by recognising mothering activities that exist in relation to “one’s own biological children, children of one’s racial ethnic community, or children who are yet unborn” (see also O’Reilly 2019). For example, Collins (1990; 1994), Reynolds (2005; 2020), Corley and Raheem (2019) and Brady (2022) all identify how by taking part in different activities of nurture such as working in teaching, healthcare, third-sector organisations, taking part in community activism, engaging in paid work, self-care etc. Black women care for, nurture and *mother* people within their communities challenging the biological boundaries that restrict traditionally White middle-classed notions of mothering. Such strategies of resistance have been referred to with different terms in the literature such as “racial justice work” (Brady 2022:159), “community motherwork” (Corley and Raheem 2019:5) and “activist mothering” (Naples 1992:441).

Motherwork is thus a useful analytical framework for conceptualising Black mothers' experiences during and after imprisonment in relation to how survival, power and identity is challenged and negotiated in such contexts and is thus drawn upon throughout this thesis. Accordingly, emphasis is not only placed on the mothering of children in this thesis, although this does formulate the majority of consideration, but also on the mothering of extended familial networks, community and the nurturing of the self. Furthermore, Cooper (2007) argues that by using motherwork as a theoretical framework, strategies for Black maternal care become foregrounded and this works to actively challenge stereotypical discourses that have often portrayed Black women, and especially Black criminalised mothers, as 'unfit' and 'uncaring' mothers.

2.10 Summary

In this chapter, I have drawn upon literature that together contributes to an understanding of Black motherhood, mothering practices and familial structures positioned within specific historical contexts. Wherever possible I have engaged with literature produced by Black women to further support an understanding of Black mothering from the perspective of Black women themselves. Through their writing or their active involvement as participants in research, Black women are therefore the guiding voices of this literary story. Furthermore, by considering what is meant by Black motherhood, I have used this chapter to form a basis for understanding how Black women may experience mothering within the context of imprisonment, which I attend to in more detail in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Black Mothering and Imprisonment

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I review a range of literature relevant for supporting an understanding of the experiences of Black mothers in and after imprisonment. In the first four sections, I consider the experiences of Black imprisoned women more broadly as well as the more general pains of imprisonment, with emphasis placed on exploring the presence of racialised and gendered inequality within the context of imprisonment. Across the following four sections, I then focus on mothering and imprisonment with attention given to the sentencing of Black mothers, the hidden sentences served by children, families and communities, perinatal care in prisons, mothering identities and emotions during imprisonment. At the end of the chapter, I then review literature which relates to Black mothers' experiences post-imprisonment and end with a conceptualisation of imprisoned 'time'.

I utilised several different search techniques to identify a wide range of literature and materials relevant for this review. I engaged closely with sources specific to the context of the legal system of England and Wales. However, where relevant, I also identified international literature to address the current gaps in British scholarship and to strengthen the overall arguments being made. Many of the journal articles drawn upon were identified by searching University databases such as SCOPUS and ASSIA and using keywords as a means of narrowing the search. Some examples of the keywords searched for are as follows: "Black femininity", "Black mothers AND prison", "race gender prison", "mothers AND prison", "prison AND families" and "mothering identities AND prison". The books cited were identified and engaged with through Cardiff University Library or from being ordered online. The policy reviews, reports, charity websites, blog posts and poems were accessed via google search.

3.2 Criminalisation and Imprisonment

Concerning women's imprisonment more generally, feminist scholars largely understand offending as a response to different forms of marginalisation and trauma that women and *mothers* often have disproportionately faced before a term of imprisonment. Such harms include poverty, abuse, childhood trauma, addiction, and difficulties with mental health (see

Carlen 1998; Chigwada-Bailey 2003; Sudbury 2005; Corston 2007; Prison Reform Trust 2017; Baldwin 2021; Howes et al 2021; The Prison Reform Trust 2021; Fuentes 2022). Rutter and Barr (2021) thus emphasise the importance of addressing the structural conditions and processes of marginalisation that surround the imprisonment of women.

Notably, *some* forms of marginalisation are argued to be exacerbated for Black imprisoned women and mothers such as poverty, racism, not having adequate support with mental health and increased the likelihood of state intervention through local authority care, school exclusion and police surveillance (Chigwada-Bailey 2007; Coston 2007; Cox and Sacks-Jones 2017; HM Inspectorate of Prisons 2020; Agenda and Alliance for Youth Justice 2021; Fuentes 2022). In the community, Black women have also been identified as being 14% less likely than White women to be referred to a refuge by police indicating a lack of state protection against experiences of harm (Refuge 2021). Writing on the criminalisation of imprisoned mothers in America Fuentes (2022:2) states: “The greater the cumulative effect of multiple, intersecting marginalities a woman faces, the greater her likelihood of trauma, incarceration, surveillance, and control that frequently result in further trauma and incarceration”.

Most of the current discourse in England and Wales which seeks to problematise the use of imprisonment against women is based on the understanding that women are more likely to be imprisoned for non-violent offences and receive short-term custodial sentences of less than twelve months (Corston 2007; Ministry of Justice 2018d; Ministry of Justice 2020a; Prison Reform Trust 2021). It is often argued that the disruptive and traumatic impact of short-term imprisonment is not considered a proportionate response to 1) the types of offences for which women are predominately imprisoned and 2) the circumstances which often lead to their imprisonment in the first place (Cooper 2020; Lane 2021; Ministry of Justice 2018d; Prison Reform Trust 2021). However, such arguments often overlook the needs and experiences of women serving long-term sentences (Vince and Evison 2021) as well as women convicted of violence.

When considering the experiences of Black imprisoned women, who are likely to be serving prison sentences of longer than a year (Ministry of Justice 2020a;2022) it is crucial to engage with discourses that include their experiences and reflect their specific needs. The average

custodial sentence length for women categorised as 'Black' in 2021 was 18.6 months (Ministry of Justice 2022). Similar patterns were also identifiable for women categorised as 'Mixed' and 'Other' who were, on average, serving sentences of around 26.3 and 23.5 months. 'Asian' women were identified as being likely to serve 21.2 months and the majority of 'White' women were found to be serving sentences of 15.6 months (Ministry of Justice 2022). Accordingly, Samota and Blake (2012) and Thomas (2021a:19) argue that strategies for women's prison reform, which largely center their focus on the removal of short-term custodial sentences, leave the majority of imprisoned women who are racialised as 'non-White' "out of the conversation".

Adopting a Black feminist approach for responding to women's imprisonment is thus vital for ensuring that Black women's experiences are not rendered invisible beneath majority discourses. However, Rutter and Barr (2021:168) also argue that we have a lot to "learn" from intersectional abolition feminisms that focus on challenging structural inequality and marginalisation. An abolitionist approach thus lends itself to a more nuanced critique of the relationship between the prison system and racialised oppression, which has been considered more extensively within abolitionist and feminist abolitionist literatures (see Davis 2003a;2015; Davis et al 2022; Gilmore 2020; Roberts 2019), as reflected in the following quote by Clarke and Chadwick (2017:65):

What is required is a narrative informed by critiques of the institutions that fail women, exposing the specific racist practices that result in the disproportionate criminalisation of Black women and how economically marginalised women's experiences of welfare intervention, often in both their childhood and adult lives, is tied to their punishment.

There are also racialised differences in the offence types for which women are remanded and imprisoned (see Agozino 1997; Sudbury 2005; Joseph 2006; HM Inspectorate of Prisons 2009; Uhrig 2016; Lammy 2017; Ministry of Justice 2019a), and this is likely to account in part for the racialised differences observed between sentence lengths. Utilising the court proceedings data base, it is found that 36.3% of Black women sent to prison in 2018 were imprisoned for theft offences compared to the 53.1% of all women sentenced to imprisonment (Ministry of Justice 2019b). Black women were also more likely to be imprisoned for offences such as miscellaneous crimes against society, violence against the person, drug offences, possession

of weapons and fraud compared to the general women's prison population (Ministry of Justice 2019b). However, differences in offence types do not necessarily reflect patterns of offending but rather wider processes of criminalisation, such as disproportionate policing within, and racism towards, Black communities (Agozino 1997; Chigwada-Bailey 1989; Sudbury 2005; Russell-Brown 2017; Lammy 2017).

An example of how institutional processes of criminalisation and racism can impact the racialised distribution of offence types is evident in the construction of, and response to, drug-related crime in the criminal justice system¹⁵. Between 2017 and 2018, Black individuals were disproportionately policed through stop and search powers (Ministry of Justice 2019) increasing the likelihood of being caught, charged and imprisoned for drug possession or intent to supply. Once in court, Black women were then twice more likely to be sentenced to imprisonment for drug offences compared to White women when convicted of the *same* offence (Uhrig 2016), depicting a racialised phenomenon of policing, and sentencing. Conducting a report for the Ministry of Justice, using published national statistics as well as non-public data provided by the Crown Prosecution Service, Uhrig (2016:22) identifies that the high percentage of "Black women convicted of drug offences can be traced back to a combination of disproportionate arrest and disproportionate custodial sentencing at the Crown Court". Whilst the data presented was published in 2016, Uhrig's report is one of the few published by the Ministry of Justice that provides a detailed description of the intersections between 'race' and 'gender', accounting for the specific experiences of Black women.

Furthermore, Tomaszewska (2016:17-18) also identified that 47% of women classified in the prison system as 'foreign nationals'¹⁶ were imprisoned for drug offences, such as importation, and the majority of such women were from "'New Commonwealth' states such as Jamaica and Nigeria" which have "colonial ties to Britain". It is consequently argued that patterns of

¹⁵ Of the mothers whose narratives informed this thesis, drug related crime appeared to be the most common offence type for which they had been imprisoned.

¹⁶The Parole Board (2020:3) state that in the prison system of England and Wales the classification of 'foreign national prisoners' applies to people "who are not citizens of the UK... and who are likely to be deported". In this thesis, the term will be presented in inverted commas to indicate that this is not terminology that I would personally use.

imprisonment relating to drug offences reflect the ongoing racialised harms of colonialism which have, through economic marginalisation, made it possible for organised drug networks to exploit the vulnerability of women as well as the political infrastructures within such states, emphasising the importance of understanding the social and historical processes which lead to offending and criminalisation (Tomaszewska 2016:18). However, when looking at the demographics of women classified as 'foreign nationals' in the prison system more broadly it is found that the majority of women hold citizenship in European countries, are racialised as non-White and more specifically around 27% are racialised as Black (Prison Reform Trust and Hibiscus Initiatives 2018).

In their joint briefing paper, Agenda and the Alliance for Youth Justice (2021) highlight 17% of custodial sentences served by Black women aged 18-24 are for convictions relating to assaults against emergency workers. However, guided by seven interviews with women aged 17-28 with lived experience of the criminal justice system, a focus group with an additional six women and conversations with several support services, Agenda and the Alliance for Youth Justice (2021:10) argue that many women perceived to be displaying "challenging or unusual behaviour' are often arrested... despite showing signs of distress or themselves being victims of crime" (Agenda and Alliance for Youth justice 2021:10). In their blog post, Olchawski and Goodfellow (2021) thus stress that the new Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill which proposes an increase in sentence lengths for assaults on emergency workers may disproportionately impact Black women who are often more likely to be perceived as violent and dangerous, rather than in need of support by emergency services.

Chigwada-Bailey (1989) conducted 10 interviews with Black women, eight of whom were mothers, who had experienced imprisonment in England. In her journal article, she describes the experience of Fumi, a Black British mother, who was wrongly accused of having a forged passport (Chigwada-Bailey 1989). In interview, Fumi recalled the police stating "We know you Black people, you disguise yourselves" highlighting how racist assumptions shaped her unjust arrest and subsequent remand (Chigwada-Bailey 1989:101). To understand differences in criminal convictions and custodial sentencing rates, the role of racism, sexism and classism within the criminal justice system and wider society resulting in disproportionate surveillance and harsher treatment must be acknowledged, as explored further in section 3.5 (Lewis 1986;

Chigwada-Bailey 1989;2003). This is supported by Clarke and Chadwick (2017: 57) who problematise narratives of reform that solely centre “the troubled woman and her complex needs” rather than explicitly challenging the “process of criminalisation, as part of an ongoing experience of trauma and institutional failure in the lives of women”.

3.3 The Pains of Imprisonment

The prison has long been recognised as an institution that causes psychological harm (Sykes 1958; Walker and Worrall 2000; Crewe 2011; Baldwin 2021) and at times physical harm (Crawley 2005; Phillips 2012; Abbott 2018) to those confined within its walls (see also Sisters Uncut 2019). As initially conceptualised by Sykes (1958), 'the pains of imprisonment' has become a central feature of the sociology of imprisonment, in recognising and discussing the prevalence of psychological harm during penal imprisonment, as well as other contexts of confinement (Haggerty and Bucerius 2020; see also Foucault 1975¹⁷). Through his research at a men’s prison, Sykes (1958) identified five main deprivations that he argued characterised the pains of imprisonment: the loss of ‘liberty’, ‘goods and services’ ‘heterosexual relationships’, ‘autonomy’ and ‘security’. However, the reductive nature of these pains, as well as their relevance in different contexts and for different populations, has since been challenged. In light of this, Haggerty and Bucerius (2020: 2) suggest that there has been an extensive scope for “ensuing scholars to expand the pains framing”.

Regarding the contemporary prison, Crewe (2011) argues that whilst penal power has arguably been ‘softened’ since the context of Sykes’ (1958) writing, the pains of imprisonment and the abuses that exist within such institutional spaces remain. However, there are now additional pains reflective of “the reconfiguration of penal power” which has seen a shift from brutal forms of dominance and control to more psychological restrictions enforced through institutional expectations of compliance and self-governance, the ever-present threat of psychological assessment and labelling as well as, for long-term and indeterminate-sentenced prisoners, an overarching culture of uncertainty and indeterminacy (Crewe 2011: 512; Crewe 2009). Furthermore, academic literature has increasingly argued that the pains of

¹⁷ In his writing, Foucault (1975:16) describes how punishment in contemporary society had become primarily concerned with confining, controlling and regulating “the soul”.

imprisonment are not universal and that pains will not only be experienced differently across historical contexts but also between different social groups – for example, in relation to gender (Walker and Worrall 2000; Crewe and Wright 2017; Maycock 2020), motherhood (Baldwin 2021; Nuytiens and Jahaes 2022), racialisation (Phillips 2012), age (Crawley 2005) and nationality (Warr 2016; Ugelvik and Damsa 2018).

Importantly for this thesis, Crewe and Wright's (2017) comparative research, based on surveys and in-depth interviews in 25 prisons with 310 men and 23 women who were serving long life sentences (of over 15 years) that they had received at age 25 or below, focuses on the gendered pains of imprisonment. They found that for women, losing contact with their children, family and friends was often constructed as central to their experiences of imprisonment and that a heightened sense of pain was derived through an inability to fulfill societal expectations associated with '*good mothering*' whilst imprisoned (Crewe and Wright 2017; see also Enos 2001; Baldwin 2021). These findings reflect earlier research conducted by Walker and Worrall (2000) who interviewed women serving life sentences within English prisons. Interestingly, however, Walker and Worrall (2000) not only identified that many women suffered from being separated from their children but also how some women felt – through losing their reproductive autonomy whilst serving a life sentence – they may be prevented from becoming mothers or having more children. The gendered pains of imprisonment were thus felt through the strain placed on existing mothering relationships but also through the reduced possibility of future motherhood.

There is also a growing body of literature that is specifically concerned with acknowledging the 'maternal pains of imprisonment' (see sections 3.8, 3.9 and 3.10). Through interviews and sharing letters with 43 criminalised mothers, Baldwin (2021:26) identifies that there are "persisting pains of maternal imprisonment" which are not only unique to mothers during their imprisonment as experienced through separation and subsequent feelings of guilt and shame but which also extend beyond the prison sentences for years after release resulting in "long lasting [experiences of] trauma". Nuytiens and Jahaes (2022) also discuss 'the maternal pains of imprisonment' in their research informed by interviews with imprisoned mothers and staff in a Belgian prison nursery. Importantly, their research expands the maternal pains framing which often focuses on separation to include mothers who are imprisoned with their children

(see also section 3.8). Whilst some mothers described the positives of being able to cohabit with their children, there was also a concern that children may experience their own pains of imprisonment (due to the noise, strict regime and inability to live outside of the prison) (Nuytiens and Jahaes 2022). Some mothers were also apprehensive about their ability to mother as they would have in the outside world, and this anxiety was experienced as a pain in itself (Nuytiens and Jahaes 2022).

Whilst there is a growing interest in acknowledging the maternal pains of imprisonment, with some discourses arguing against the imprisonment of mothers altogether (Level Up et al 2021), there remains a gap in academic understandings of how the pains of racialisation and racism may intersect with the pains of motherhood during¹⁸ imprisonment. Phillips (2012) conducted research across two prison sites, where she facilitated interviews with 60 men, with a focus on understanding constructions of masculinity, race and inequality in prisons. In her exploration of the 'pains of racism', Phillips (2012:173) represents several different perspectives regarding male understandings of racism and discrimination within prisons, which included: "less common... accusations of blatant racism" (such as name calling, racist comments and brutality), "tentative suggestions about the potentially racialised sources of differential treatment" (such as not being unlocked on time, not being supported by staff, seeing others being treated more favourably) and "flat denials of prisoner officer racism". Although her research provides an understanding of the racialised experiences of imprisonment, which are central to this thesis, there remains a gap in academic understandings of the pains of imprisonment which are felt specifically at the intersections of Blackness, femininity and motherhood in England. The following section explores government and prison service commissioned reports focused on the racialised and gendered experiences of imprisonment.

3.4 Race [and Gender?] Relations

In 2008, the Ministry of Justice published 'The Race Review' to monitor the progress of race relations within Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) of England and Wales

¹⁸ Mitchell and Davis (2019:422) discuss the 'pains of Black womanhood and motherhood' for criminalised mothers in America, *after* their release from prison, who "have the added burden of raising their children in a racist society" (see section 3.11). However, these pains of Black womanhood and motherhood are not considered *during* imprisonment.

between 2003 and 2008. This review followed the 'Racial Inequality in Prisons' investigation in 2003 which was prompted by the racist murder of Zahid Mubarek by his cellmate in a Young Offender Institution (YOI) (Commission for Racial Equality 2003; Keith Inquiry 2006). HMP Brixton, HMP Parc and YOI Feltham were used as case studies in the investigation; with the latter being the establishment in which Zahid was killed. The subsequent investigation led by the Commission for Racial Equality (2003) identified fourteen major shortcomings of the Prison Service regarding the unequal and discriminative treatment of imprisoned people and prison staff. The review was used as a means of requesting racial inequality be addressed, yet none of the prisons used as case studies in the investigation were based within the women's prison estate, clearly overlooking the racialised experiences of imprisonment for women.

By 2008, based on internal findings by the Ministry of justice (2008) racial equality was argued to have 'improved' with 85% of prisons in England and Wales meeting or exceeding the race relations key performance targets. The Ministry of Justice (2008) reported that over 50% of their staff had reported receiving diversity training in the last three years, every prison had an allocated race equality officer, the diversity of staff had increased from 5.7% to 6.2% in four years; and food, hair and other products were claimed to be more culturally diverse. However, despite meeting such performance targets, people racialised as non-White were still found to report high levels of differential treatment and unfairness (Ministry of Justice 2008). Black imprisoned people were 30% more likely to be on the basic¹⁹ regime, 50% more likely to be in segregation and 60% more likely to have force used against them than White imprisoned people (Ministry of Justice 2008). It was concluded that "more need[ed] to be done" (Ministry of Justice 2008:100). Notably, similarly to the 'Racial Equality in Prisons' investigation (2003), the Race Review (2008) made very few comments regarding imprisoned women's experiences, again downplaying the intersections between racialisation and gender.

In response to the continued oversight of women within discussions around racial equality in prisons, HM Inspectorate of Prisons published a report in 2009 titled '*Race relations in prison:*

¹⁹ The incentive and Earned Privilege Scheme (IEPS) is characterised by 'basic', 'standard' and 'enhanced' regimes. Prison staff can 'reward' or 'punish' imprisoned people by moving their IEP level up or down based on their behaviour. Different classifications thus enable or restrict access to privileges in prison, such as number of family visits per month.

Responding to women from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds'. The purpose of this report was to acknowledge the experiences of women racialised as non-White, whose specific needs and experiences had been omitted from the Race Review in 2008 (HM Inspectorate of Prisons 2009:5). Emphasis was also placed on understanding the experiences of women categorised as 'foreign national prisoners' who faced additional layers of marginalisation due to their immigration (non-citizen) status, language barriers and distance from family. The report found several racialised differences between women's experiences of imprisonment relating to areas such as offence types, sentencing patterns, treatment from staff, treatment within the IEPs, health needs, family relationships, housing needs and employment needs. HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2009:19) concluded that:

The consistently poor perceptions of Black and minority ethnic and foreign national prisoners in our surveys, point to the multiple levels of discrimination faced by Black and minority ethnic and foreign national women prisoners.

However, throughout the report women were largely discussed as one homogenous group classified under the heading of 'Black and minority ethnic'. This can be considered problematic as it not only results in the simplification of marginalised lived experiences but it also unintentionally, or intentionally, acts as a means of racialised othering (Phillips et al 2020). It implies '*White women experience this*' and '*everyone else experiences that*' removing the possibility of developing more nuanced narratives where Whiteness is not used as the overarching standard of comparison.

Just under ten years following these reviews, Lammy (2017:1) offered "an independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System". The need for this review signifies the persisting and deep-rooted systematic issues of racism and discrimination within the criminal justice system. Thirty-five recommendations for addressing racial inequality were presented within the review which included goals to "increase the fairness and effectiveness of the Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) system" and to tackle the disproportionate use of force by prison officers (Lammy 2017:8), both of which had also previously been highlighted as issues in the 2008 Race Review. The Lammy review (2017:51) also found that 38% of women described in the report as "BAME" felt the IEP scheme was fair compared to 59% of women defined as White.

However, the experiences of women and girls largely remained peripheral within the Report perhaps due to the small percentage of women who are imprisoned.

Notably, in 2022 the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) in collaboration with the Criminal Justice Alliance (CJA) released their report focused on improving the outcomes for “Black, Asian and minority ethnic people held across the women’s prison estate in England” based on surveys conducted with 266 women across all 12 prisons (IMB and CJA 2022:2)²⁰. It was identified that the experiences of Black imprisoned women were “particularly bad”, especially regarding incidents of discrimination and a lack of institutional understanding of cultural needs (IMB and CJA 2022:39). Whilst this report provides an essential insight into current racialised experiences *across* the women’s prison estate, the use of surveys, necessary for reaching a wider population, does not enable emphasis to be placed on personal histories and in-depth lived experiences. Additionally, motherhood, which intersects with ‘gender’ and ‘racialisation’ for many imprisoned women, is not explored within the Report. Although, it is necessary to acknowledge that Farmer’s (2019) review into the strengthening of familial relationships for women in prison does give some consideration the intersections of ‘racialisation’ and motherhood, as highlighted in section 3.7. Before moving on to focus more closely on motherhood, I detail academic literature and other relevant sources that focus on the *specific* experiences of Black women during imprisonment and the social and historical contexts which shape their treatment within these institutional environments, as explored below.

3.5 Misogynoir

Misogynoir refers to the intertwined experience of sexism and racism faced specifically by Black women (Bailey and Trudy 2018). It is therefore understood that Black women’s experience of racism will always be different to that of Black men and that Black women’s experience of gendered oppression will always be different to other women (Crenshaw 1991). It is acknowledged that other groups of women also face racism that intersects with sexism but that these experiences are shaped by differing historical contexts, cultural assumptions, stereotypes, and treatment. In her book focused on Black women’s’ experiences of the criminal

²⁰ It is important to note, that there is mention of non-binary and transgendered identities in any of the reports reviewed in this section and so the racialised and gendered experiences of such people remain silenced (see Davis 2015).

justice system, Chigwada-Bailey (2003) argues that the prison service can be understood as an environment created by, and in the interest of, White (and I would argue middle-upper-classed) men. Consequently, Black women face additional burdens shaped by both their gendered and racialised marginalisation, as well as other intersecting identities, in the prison environment (Devlin 1998; Chigwada-Bailey 2004; Cardale et al 2017). Such burdens are reflected in Lady Unchained's (2017, 1:03- 2:25) poem *'Dear Mum'*, relating to her experience of imprisonment as a Black woman in England:

Does my life not mean a thing?
Is my skin colour too dark for them to have respect for me?
Don't they see that I too have a beating heart just like them
and two eyes to see
just how much hatred they have for me?

Stereotypical Eurocentric perceptions which label Black women as strong, challenging and hostile are argued to shape the treatment they receive during imprisonment by both staff and other imprisoned women (Devlin 1998; Chigwada-Bailey 2003; Roberts 2012; Charlton 2014; Cox and Sacks-Jones 2016; Motz et al 2020). Devlin (1998:1) conducted interviews and observations in women's prisons in England between 1992 and 1998. During this time, she observed prison staff describing Black women as "big and strong", "big Black girls" and "difficult to control"; labels which resulted in more regulative and punitive treatment (Devlin 1998:220). Interestingly, however, she found that not all Black women were perceived in the same way and that societal constructions of intersecting identities such as nationality and class also impacted treatment (Devlin 1998). In relation to nationality, Chigwada-Bailey (1989:103) found that the discriminatory treatment of "Black non-British women was not uncommon" with one woman stating: "They were horrible to foreign Black women, reminding them all the time about where they came from and saying how lucky they were to have this and that". However, she also acknowledges that due to constructions of race all Black women can come to be perceived as 'immigrants' – whether born in Britain or not – with racist treatment being underpinned by an assumption of 'otherness' (Chigwada-Bailey 1989).

Whilst Devlin's (1998) and Chigwada-Bailey's (1989) research was conducted 20-30 years ago it appears that Black women continue to face similar treatment within prisons (Motz et al

2020). In a more recent study, Cox and Sacks-Jones (2016:3) conducted three focus groups in both the community and in prisons with twenty women described as having “Black”, “Black British”, “Asian”, “Mixed” and “White (European)” racialised identities. Some of the women felt that during periods of association prison officers separated groups of Black women more commonly than they separated groups of White women, implying that prison officers may profile Black groups of women as troublesome or disruptive (Cox and Sacks-Jones 2016). This mirrored Devlin’s (1998) earlier findings where a Black woman in an open prison described her frustration at not being allowed to work in a group with other Black women, due to what she felt was a fear of Black women held by the staff. Additional literature has also identified women racialised as ‘non-White’, as being less likely to come out of their cells for association and exercise perhaps resulting from continued experiences of scrutiny, judgement and intense supervision when outside of their cells (HM Inspectorate of Prisons 2009; Cardale et al 2017).

The strained relationship between many Black women and prison staff is also found to impact access to support (Cox and Sacks-Jones 2017). Black imprisoned women are less likely to report having difficulties with their mental health despite high levels of complex trauma being present in the community (Chigwada-Bailey 2003). Low self-reporting rates have been attributed to many Black women not encountering staff they can trust, cultural stigma and language barriers maintained by the institution (HM Inspectorate 2009; Cardale et al 2017). However, it has been argued that staff also often fail to recognise how such needs present for Black women, and so they go unnoticed or due to prejudices ignored (see HM Inspectorate of Prisons 2009; Cooper et al 2010; Cardale et al 2017). Cox and Sack-Jones (2017:7) also argue that not only are Black women in prison often regarded as “loud and aggressive” but their mental health needs are also more likely to be reduced to issues of “anger management” resulting in punishment rather than treatment (see also IMB and CJA 2022). Black femininity is thus too often assumed synonymous with loudness, badness and aggressiveness, all of which stand in contention with an institution that demands conformity and compliance (Davies 2018). The way in which Black women are seen as in need of domination and quietening is argued to have resulted in otherwise preventable deaths in custody, following “failures by police officers and prison officers” and “medical neglect” (Chigwada-Bailey 2003:108; see also Frazer-Carrol 2019 and Thomas and Bozkurt, forthcoming).

Reflecting upon the death of Sarah Reed, a thirty-two-year-old Black-mixed-race mother who was remanded whilst she awaited a mental health assessment to stand trial, Aiyegbusi (2020:54) emphasises how “Black women’s vulnerabilities and distress become framed and responded to in terms of risk and danger”. Sarah had been suffering from several severe mental health problems following the death of her child and a racist assault that she suffered at the hands of a police officer (Inquest 2017). However, rather than receiving support whilst imprisoned she was denied access to appropriate medication and put in isolation (Inquest 2017). Despite being considered at risk of suicide and being placed on an ACCT²¹ document on the 28th of December 2015, “a screen was placed in front of her cell to block the hatch” and staff were told to avoid her as she had been “acting aggressively” (Inquest 2017: para 8). It was also recorded that “she was deemed such a risk to staff that she was on a ‘four man unlock’” which required four officers to be present when entering her cell (Inquest 2017: para 8). Sarah’s cell checks were also reduced from two checks every hour to one and she was prevented from receiving both legal and social visits and was not allowed to leave her cell even to shower (Inquest 2017). Sarah was rendered extremely isolated and vulnerable and due to delays and failures at the hands of prison staff she died two weeks later, on the 11th of January 2016 (Inquest 2017).

Writing about the experiences of Sarah, the treatment of Black women in HMP Holloway²² and Black women’s imprisonment more generally Davies (2018b) concludes that negative stereotypes surrounding Black femininity have seemingly led to “being Black” becoming an “offence in itself”. It is as though, Black women are positioned as being particularly suited to imprisonment due to stereotypical perceptions of their strength and endurance but then, and almost simultaneously, they become particularly vulnerable to being punished in the prison environment due to this assumed resistance. This is reinforced by Davis (2003) and Gross (2015) who argue that the assumed intrinsic strength, aggressiveness and criminality of Black women, views that are traceable back to slavery, have often led to Black women being seen as particularly suited to masculine approaches to punishment centered around the prison. In

²¹ An Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) is a document used for monitoring, and developing a plan of care for, imprisoned people at risk of self-harm or suicide.

²² HMP Holloway, a closed prison located in London, was the largest women’s prison in Europe until it closed in 2016.

contrast, White middle-classed notions of femininity are argued to have shaped more psychiatric approaches to punishment as White middle-classed women were often seen as “insane” rather than inherently “criminal”, leading to differing approaches to confinement (Davis 2003a:67).

In their book *‘Abolition. Feminism. Now’*, Davis et al (2022:19) emphasise how Black women such as Sarah are often “the targets of interlocking forms of interpersonal and state violence... where race, gender and marginality play a similar role in criminalisation”. In keeping with their feminist abolitionist standpoint, they go on to argue that radical changes are needed, through the dismantling of such oppressive systems and the development of new strategies of support, to prevent further incidences of racialized and gendered structural harm and violence (Davis et al 2022). Following the closure of HMP Holloway the Feminist direct action group Sisters Uncut (2022:20) demanded that the site of the prison that had previously been a “space of state violence be transformed into a building providing anti-violence services [and affordable housing] for women and nonbinary people” (see also Sisters Uncut 2019). In their Statement on the sale of Holloway Prison, Sisters Uncut (2019:9) stated: “We hope the new site can act as a remedy for the pain so many women suffered at the hands of state violence”. Abolitionist activist campaigns, therefore, provide opportunities for resistance against structural forms of oppression maintained by the prison system and provide creative strategies for better addressing processes of racialised and gendered marginalisation, victimisation and criminalisation.

At the heart of abolition, therefore, is a call to delink systems of ‘imprisonment’ from systems of ‘care’, so that care (health support, mental health support, housing etc.) can be provided in ways that do not rely on, and maintain, the very existence of the prison system as well as racialised and gendered injustice (Davis et al 2022). As Davis (2003a: 107) argues, we are “not be looking for prisonlike substitutes ... such as house arrest safeguarded by electronic bracelets”. Rather through processes of decarceration, that is the dismantling of the prison system, we come to “envision a continuum of alternatives to imprisonment ... [such as] the revitalization of education at all levels, a health system that provides free physical and mental care to all, and a justice system based on reparation and reconciliation rather than retribution and vengeance” (Davis 2003a: 107). In further considering interlocking forms of oppression

within the criminal justice system, the next section explores the unequal sentencing of Black mothers.

3.6 Black Mothers and Sentencing

Article 8 of the Human Rights Act (1998) states everyone should have the: “right to respect for their private and family life, home and correspondence [with] no interference by a public authority... except such as in accordance with law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country”. Considering this, when sentencing primary caregivers²³, judges are expected to conduct a ‘balancing exercise’ to ensure that their “child’s right to family life [are] only interfered with to the extent that it is both necessary and proportionate” (Human Rights Act 1998; Minson 2017:9). In their research focused on the sentencing of mothers, Epstein (2011) and Minson (2014; 2017) both found that balancing exercises to establish the justification of imprisonment against familial impact were rarely carried out.

In Minson’s (2017) doctoral thesis focused on maternal sentencing, which was in part informed by interviews with 20 judges, only 13 were aware they were expected to conduct a separate and specific balancing exercise relating to the sentencing of a parent, 11 stated they used their discretion for deciding whether the impact on children was relevant to the sentence type and no judges felt the child’s best interest always had to be considered. It was also found that in “cases of a repeat offender or with more serious criminality or dangerousness” judges felt being a primary carer was “irrelevant” to sentencing decisions (Minson 2017:152). For Black women, who may be more likely to be stereotyped as dangerous (see section 2.8) the impact of imprisonment on their mothering relationships and responsibilities may thus be more likely to be viewed by judges as ‘irrelevant’. However, Minson (2017:237) acknowledges her research does not consider the intersectional relationship between race, gender and class within sentencing, despite it being “very likely that experiences and outcomes are affected by those factors”.

²³ It is recognised mothers are not the only primary carers of children and that other groups with caring responsibilities must also be included in broader discussions on sentencing guidelines and familial impacts. However, in keeping with this thesis, this section focuses on literature relating specifically to women and mothers.

Sudbury (2005:66) highlights, that the concept of judicial chivalry often does not apply to the treatment of Black women by the courts as they “do not fall under the benevolent patriarchal protection of the White men who judge them”. This is reinforced by Chigwada-Bailey (2003:xii; 39) who argues Black women are “treated more harshly by sentencers” despite there being no evidence they commit more serious crimes, due to racialised conceptions of “goodness” and “badness”. Concerning the sentencing of mothers, it is therefore suggested that although motherhood may be constructed as a mitigating factor in the cases of White mothers it is likely to be depicted as an “aggravating” factor in the cases of Black mothers (Chigwada-Bailey 1997:127; Agozino 1997; Chigwada-Bailey 2003). Black mothers may thus receive harsher treatment from judges who feel they do not meet White hegemonic ideals of mothering (Chigwada-Bailey 2003). Importantly, through her interviews with 20 Black mothers in and after prison, Chigwada-Bailey (2003:70) also found some Black mothers felt that judges did not accept the recommendations in their pre-sentence reports due to them being “too good” and going against preconceived ideas of Black womanhood.

In her book, described as a polemic about the law in Britain, Kennedy (1992) discusses how for Black mothers appearing in court, their mothering practices and principles are often not valued but rather looked down upon and criminalised resulting in more punitive treatment (see section 3.6). For Black women, motherhood, or their perceived failure at motherhood, may be used as justification for their imprisonment and consequent separation from their children rather than as mitigation against it (Chigwada-Bailey 2003; Roberts 2012). Despite these suggestions, there is currently no research that examines statistical differences between the sentencing of Black mothers and mothers from other racialised backgrounds although there is research that suggests Black women more generally face disproportionate and harsher sentencing (Kennedy 1992; Uhrig 2016; Cardale et al 2017; Monteith et al 2022; Thomas and Bozkurt Forthcoming). Additionally, as both Kennedy and Chigwada-Bailey were writing in the 1990s and early 2000s, more recent research is also needed to reflect Black mothers’ current perceptions of sentencing experiences. The following section considers the ‘hidden sentences’ received by children, family and communities when mothers are imprisoned.

3.7 'Hidden Sentences'²⁴

It is estimated that over 17,000 children in England and Wales are impacted by maternal imprisonment each year (Wilks-Wiffen 2011; Pitman and Hull 2021), with around 3,500 children estimated to have experienced the imprisonment of their mother in March 2020 (Pitman and Hull 2021). However, there are currently no official figures that illustrate the actual number of children who have a mother, or any parent, in prison as such information is not recorded by any Criminal Justice (such as police, courts, prisons) or other social agencies (such as schools, healthcare, social services) (Minson 2021). The number of children with a parent in prison is therefore largely *hidden* and *underacknowledged* (Marshall 2008; Barnardos 2015). Whilst Imprisonment no doubt affects all children with an imprisoned parent or parents, maternal imprisonment is argued to have a specific impact as mothers are more likely to be the primary caregivers of dependent children in Britain (Roberts 2012; Booth 2018; Minson 2019). This is reflected in the findings that, in England and Wales, only 5% of children are identified as remaining in their own homes whilst their mother is imprisoned, 9% of children are known to be cared for by their fathers (Corston 2007; Prison Reform Trust 2017) and 14% of children are estimated to be in local authority care (Booth 2018). In contrast, 90% of children remain living with, and in the care of, their mothers whilst their father are imprisoned (Baldwin 2017).

The imprisonment of mothers with primary caring responsibilities²⁵ is thus argued to disproportionately disrupt the everyday lives and routines of their children, which when compounded with the psychological impacts of separation, often has severe traumatic consequences for the child (Flynn 2012; Roberts 2012; Women's Breakout 2016; Minson 2019; Minson 2021). These arguments are somewhat reflective of Bowlby's (1953; 1969) theories of maternal attachment where a close physical and emotional proximity between mother and child is considered imperative for child development and feelings of security. In Minson's (2019) research, which consisted of semi-structured interviews with 27 families impacted by maternal imprisonment many of the children interviewed expressed persistent feelings of

²⁴ 'Hidden sentences' is a term often used to describe the experiences of families and friends with a loved one in prison.

²⁵ It is recognised not all mothers are the primary caregivers of children before their imprisonment.

sadness due to separation. The grief associated with imprisonment was also described as confusing as mothers were often understood to be simultaneously present and absent, as reflected in a quote by Robert aged 16: “Having her there and not seeing her is different from not having her there at all” (Minson 2019:523). Carers also described children’s grief as resulting in “nightmares”, “sudden outbursts”, “anger” difficulties in school and issues with attachment (Minson 2019:523; see also Beresford 2008; Roberts 2012; Kahya and Ekinici 2018; Baldwin 2020).

As well as dealing with the pains of separation, many children are also argued to face additional traumas from having to move schools, leave their homes, separate from siblings and/or deal with the social stigma relating to their mother’s imprisonment, highlighting the ‘*hidden sentences*’ experienced by children with a mother in prison (Women’s Breakout 2016; Minson 2019). However, it is also important to acknowledge that adults also face many difficulties when their mothers are sent to prison although academic literature, as well as support services, rarely focus on these experiences. Beresford (2018) stresses that older children, particularly those aged between sixteen and seventeen, are often left to cope by themselves as well as being made responsible for the care of their younger siblings; and yet they are also identified as being unlikely to receive support from social services due to their age. Additionally, Baldwin (2021) described mothers with adult children and grandchildren feeling ignored during imprisonment as support was largely tailored towards younger children. She also identified other strains experienced by adult children, with mothers describing their fears or experiences of missing key life events such as funerals, childbirth and hospital appointments and visits whilst they had been imprisoned (Baldwin 2021). The vicarious sentences served by adult children are thus further hidden by their absence from the dominant discourse of maternal imprisonment.

Families and friends who take on the responsibility of caring for children whilst their mothers are imprisoned are also argued to face social, emotional and financial pressures related to maternal imprisonment (Booth 2018; Booth 2020). The financial costs of sending money to the mother, paying for phone calls and the postage of letters, funding transportation to and from visits and assuming the costs of caring for a child may become additional stresses (Braman 2004; Rees et al 2017) felt on top of emotional strains such as separation from their loved one,

supporting a child cope with being apart from their mother, navigating social stigma, adjusting usual routines and creating new family dynamics (Booth 2020; Minson 2019). For families marginalised financially, these additional financial costs associated with maintaining family ties may not be an easily available or accessible option, impacting upon contact between mother and child (Rees et al 2017).

The conflict in interests between maintaining maternal bonds and financial circumstances are also exacerbated for imprisoned women who are on average imprisoned 62 miles away from their homes, rendering visits difficult, tiring, and expensive for their families (see Social Care Institute for Excellence 2008; Rees et al 2022; Booth 2018; Booth 2020; Baldwin 2021). This may have a disproportionate impact on Black working-class families who are more likely to live in inner-city areas which are often far removed from the rural locations of women's prisons which also often lack direct public transport routes (Chigwada-Bailey 2003; HM Inspectorate of Prisons 2009) and for whom the financial strains associated with long-distance travel to and from prison visits may also be felt particularly acutely (Corston 2007; Roberts 2012; Farmer 2019). These impacts are also likely to occur over an extended period of time due to the sentence lengths received by Black women (see section 3.2). As Black mothers in England and Wales are also more likely to be *classified* as single parents than mothers from other racialised groups it is often argued that maternal imprisonment may have a disproportionate impact on such women and their dependent children (Farmer 2019; Gingerbread 2018; 2023; Baldwin 2021). Baldwin (2021) notes, little consideration has been given to the actual consequences of this for Black single mothers imprisoned in the women's prison estate in England.

As highlighted in Chapter Two, it is necessary to consider how more collective understandings of mothering responsibilities may actually provide extended systems of support for Black mother during imprisonment. In America, Enos (2001) found grandmothers racialised as Black and Hispanic were more likely to take on the childcaring responsibilities whilst their daughters were imprisoned compared to grandmothers racialised as White, and it was argued that collective mothering practices within Black familial networks, which existed pre-imprisonment, positioned many Black families as already experienced in the sharing and redistributing of childcare within their extended networks. Similarly, Snell (1994) established children in

America racialised as Black were most likely to live with other relatives or alone whilst their mother was imprisoned compared to all other racialised groups.

Additionally, Enos (2001) also found that many of the Black mothers she spoke with were highly untrusting of social services as it was viewed as another “White man’s system” in which they did not want to be involved with for fear of further subjugation (Enos 2001:64). Foster care was thus found to be predominately utilised by Black mothers who did not have family who could take care of their children (Enos 2001). In relation to England and Wales, there does not appear to be equivalent research that specifically considers the caregiving choices of Black mothers during a period of imprisonment, however, more broadly Black children in local authority care in Britain *are* the most likely racialised group to be cared for by their relatives (Wijedasa 2015).

Whilst much of this section has discussed the impact of maternal imprisonment on *children* and *families*, Roberts (2012) crucially extends her consideration of those harmed by imprisonment to include *communities*. She argues that the imprisonment of Black mothers prevents Black communities from being able to develop the necessary resources and networks needed for political solidarity and social activism, making it harder to challenge oppressive institutions such as the prison (Roberts 2012). The prison is thus seen as a tool utilised by the state to further disempower and disproportionately impact already marginalised communities, resulting in generational racial disadvantage (Roberts 2012). In summary, the families and friends of imprisoned mothers are argued to be the “invisible victims of crime and the penal system” (Marshall 2008:4). Often, their lives are disrupted, their attachments are strained, and they are indirectly punished for the crimes of their loved ones, becoming hidden victims of the state. Additionally, communities impacted by imprisonment are also seen to face hidden harms through disenfranchisement (Roberts 2012).

3.8 Pregnancy and Early Motherhood

According to Nuytiens and Jehaes (2020) existing research largely focuses on the experiences of imprisoned mothers who have been physically separated from their children. However, there is a small population of women in the prison estate who serve a period, or the entirety, of their prison sentence with their unborn babies or children (Ministry of Justice 2020b). It is

estimated that 600 pregnant women are imprisoned in England per year and around 100 babies are born whilst their mothers are imprisoned (Abbott et al 2020). Of these births, one in ten have been found to take place in either a prison cell or on the way to the hospital (Davies et al 2020), with five mothers having to give birth in prison rather than hospital in 2018 (Ministry of Justice 2020b). Whilst Edge (2006) recognises women who require perinatal care in English prisons are disproportionately racialised as ‘non-White’, a large number of whom are classified as ‘foreign nationals’ (see also Prison Reform Trust 2012; Prison Reform Trust and Hibiscus Initiatives 2023), there does not appear to be recent research that focuses specifically on Black women’s perinatal experiences during imprisonment. In the community, as Black women are four times more likely to die during childbirth than White women due to a lack of adequate support (MBRRACE-UK 2020), understanding how processes of racialisation and racism intersect with perinatal experiences during imprisonment is vital for ensuring the safety of such women and their babies.

More broadly, pregnant women are argued to have additional health, emotional and psychological needs differentiating them from the rest of the prison population (Abbott 2018; Abbott et al 2020). Edge (2006: 6) identifies how imprisoned pregnant women largely feel “unsafe, uncared for, uncomfortable and hungry” and experience severe “emotional and psychological distress”, which is often heightened by an uncertainty surrounding separation after birth. In her ethnography focused on perinatal experiences amongst women imprisoned in England, consisting of interviews with 28 women, 10 prison staff and non-participant observations, Abbott (2018:76) highlights several deprivations experienced by pregnant imprisoned women such as a lack of adequate “health care, food and nutrition, comfort, and clean air”. Women also voiced the psychological pains of being locked in their cells at night during the later stages of their pregnancies out of fear for their and their baby’s welfare, as reflected in the following quote by Sharon:

It’s horrible cos you think if anything were to happen, would they get me out in time, cos my door’s locked. Cos the night staff don’t have keys (Abbott 2018:71).

The concern Sharon expresses in Abbott’s (2018) research, is tragically reflected in the death of a baby the following year in HMP Bronzefield where officers failed to respond to the

mother's cell bell being rung in the night, emphasising the unsafe nature of the prison environment for pregnant women and their babies (Prisons and Probation Ombudsman 2021; Inquest 2023). A report by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (2021) describes how the mother, Rianna an eighteen-year-old Black woman (see Inquest 2023), had first rung her bell at 8.07pm and then again at 8.45pm, but these calls were not responded to. Despite Rianna's cell being checked twice in the night, as part of a routine roll count, nothing was recorded as being untoward. At 8.21am the following morning, an officer found that Rianna had given birth in her cell and at 9.03am paramedics confirmed the baby had died (Prisons and Probation Ombudsman 2021). Inquest (2023: np) have since concluded:

Evidence has shown that as a vulnerable 18-year-old Black woman, narratives around gangs informed the way [the mother] was treated in the community and in prison. She was viewed not as someone in need of care and compassion but as a discipline and control problem. Her calls for help went unanswered, and her pain was ignored.

It is apparent that harmful stereotypes surrounding Black femininity, as well as the context of imprisonment, prevented necessary access to perinatal care. It must thus be recognised that women will have differing needs and experiences relating to pregnancy and childbirth with some women experiencing pregnancy termination, miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, and stillbirth whilst imprisoned (Birth Companions 2019; Ministry of Justice 2020b). In discourses surrounding maternal imprisonment, perinatal experiences must thus be acknowledged in all their forms (Birth Companions 2019; Ministry of Justice 2020b).

In the English prison estate, Mother and Baby Units (MBUs) provide a setting where existing mothers, or pregnant women likely to give birth during a custodial sentence, can personally care for their babies up until they are eighteen²⁶ months of age (Ministry of Justice 2020b). It is important to note that the age limit is shaped by the cultural context of England with other prison services across the world having varied responses to the right amount of time a child can spend in prison with their mother before separation takes place (Edge 2006). MBUs are often depicted as institutional spaces located somewhere between punishment and care. This

²⁶ In some circumstances the length of stay can be extended if considered in the best interest of the child (11 Million 2008; Ministry of Justice 2020b).

is reflected in the Ministry of Justice's (2020b:7) statement that MBUs provide a "safe and nurturing environment[s] for mothers and their babies... to allow mothers/baby relationship to develop if it is in the child's interests to do so". HM Prison Service (2008:6) also earlier stated that MBUs are made "for the benefit of the children who are not prisoners and have committed no offence". The rights of children seem to be the main guiding principle behind the implementation of MBUs rather than the rights of women as mothers (Edge 2006).

In England, six of the 12 women's prisons have MBUs which between them have capacity to support 64 mothers and 70 babies (Ministry of Justice 2020b). However, mothers may be rejected if the Admissions Board²⁷ do not perceive their place on the MBU to be in the child's best interest (see Sikand 2015; Ministry of Justice 2020b), if they feel it may compromise the wellbeing and safety of other mothers and their babies (HM Prison Service 2008) and if there are not enough spaces on the unit (UK Government 2018). In his report, Farmer (2019) details how the number of mothers accepted onto MBUs has decreased and cites a general reluctance amongst community social workers to recommend that young children should live in the prison estate with their mothers.

In 2018, 118 women applied to MBUs highlighting a demand higher than availability (Ministry of Justice 2018a). However, it must also be recognised that many mothers do not apply to MBUs in the first place. O'Keefe and Dixon (2015) highlight several factors preventing mothers from applying to MBUs such as: not wanting to appear as though they have chosen their baby over their other children, a lack of information regarding MBUs, being assigned social workers who did not support MBUs, feeling like the child would be better off without them, family not agreeing with MBUs and wanting to conceal motherhood from authorities. Through interviews with sixteen women who had experience applying to MBUs, Sikand (2015) also found that little was being done by the prison service to identify women who were not pregnant but who had children under eighteen months living in the community who were also entitled to spaces on MBUs.

²⁷ The Admissions Board are responsible for making a recommendation to the prison Governor as to whether a mother should be admitted to an MBU based on the application provided.

MBUs have been argued to have their own unique population demographics due to the highly specific selection criteria involved in allocating mothers a space (Edge 2006; Prison Reform Trust and Hibiscus Initiatives 2018). In their research with 55 women, Birmingham et al (2006) found that MBUs had a higher representation of women racialised as 'non-White' as well as women classified as 'foreign nationals' compared to the general prison population partly because they were more likely to approve women facing longer prison sentences, who were not *known* to have complex mental health needs and who have restricted access to kinship care (see also Prison Reform Trust and Hibiscus Initiatives 2018). Gergoire (2010) also found that MBUs were more likely to accept women who were single mothers, another selection criterion disproportionately experienced by Black women in Britain. In 2017, data collected by the Ministry of Justice (2018a) reported that of the 118 applicants to MBUs, 14 were from Black mothers and of these, 10 were accepted and four rejected – displaying a seemingly high acceptance rate. However, it must also be noted that despite these seemingly high success rates the actual numbers of Black women applying to MBUs are very low.

Despite MBUs being described by the HM Prison Service (2009) and the Ministry of Justice (2020b) as softer environments designed to promote nurture and care, there is increasing social activism advocating for mothers to stay with their babies in the community rather than have babies join imprisoned with their mothers. In 2021, a campaign titled 'Stop sending pregnant women to prison' jointly led by Level Up, Birth Companions and Women in Prison was launched. In the fact file for the campaign, it is argued "prison will never be a safe place for pregnant women and new mothers" as it is a traumatic environment for both mother and child, they go on to appeal for the government to "put an end to imprisoning pregnant women and new mothers by changing sentencing laws" (Level Up et al 2021:2). It is asserted that in the community, perinatal mothers are more likely to receive support and appropriate healthcare for themselves and their babies which prison does not, and *cannot*, provide (Level Up et al 2021). In keeping with the recommendation of the Female Offender Strategy (2018d), therefore, such arguments advocate for the more frequent use of community sentences in replace of custodial sentences for pregnant women and mothers.

In their journal article, Hayes et al (2020:21) argue that the disproportionate imprisonment of Black and other marginalised women "violates the principles of reproductive justice". They

state the framework of ‘reproductive justice’ was developed by 12 Black women during a pro-life conference in America, in 1994 and is underpinned by three main principles to advocate for every woman to:

1. Decide if and when she will have a baby and the conditions under which she will give birth
2. Decide if she will not have a baby and her options for preventing or ending a pregnancy
3. Parent the children she already has with the necessary social supports in safe environments and healthy communities and without fear of violence from individuals or the government (Hayes et al 2020:22).

Imprisonment is thus seen to stand in opposition to reproductive justice as it renders women powerless in their ability to relatively assert agency and choice in relation to their bodies and motherhood. The ‘reproductive oppression’ of imprisonment (Hayes et al 2020; Cavanagh et al 2022) prevents mothers from having a say in where they give birth, lessens their access to safe birthing environments, restricts access to nutrition needed during pregnancy, reduces capacities for autonomous decision making and temporarily – or sometimes permanently - challenges the ability to mother outside of the prison walls (Abbott 2018; Abbott 2020; Hayes et al 2020; Nuytiens and Jehaes; 2020 Cavanagh et al 2022). In their conclusion, Hayes et al (2020: 24) argue that in order to ensure reproductive justice there needs to be a social commitment to: ensuring all imprisoned women have access to quality healthcare, challenging structural racism, guaranteeing that reproductive justice is part of all political agendas and “imagining a world without prisons”, reflecting a close connection to feminist abolitionist arguments. The following section considers the impact of this *reproductive oppression* on mothering identities and emotions in relation to mothers separated from their children during imprisonment.

3.9 Mothering Identities and Emotions

“To become a prisoner is almost by definition to become a bad mother”
(Corston 2007:20)

The imprisonment of mothers is not only found to impact the lives of their children, extended families, and communities (see section 3.7) but is also argued to have an impact on women’s

understanding of themselves as ‘mothers’ (Barnes and Stringer 2014; Baldwin 2018; 2021; Easterling et al 2018; Lockwood 2018). Arendell (2000:1192) argues that mothering is often defined as an engagement in social practices and activities associated with nurture and care. Engaging in activities socially or personally associated with mothering reinforces and strengthens the connection someone may feel to their mothering identity (Arendell 2000). This is supported by Cunningham Stringer (2020) who argue mothering is a behaviour and an identity. As imprisonment results in the temporary (or sometimes indefinite) diminishing of many mothering responsibilities and activities, therefore, it can often restrict access to desired mothering identities (Easterling et al 2018; Baldwin. 2021).

If a mother and child choose and are permitted to maintain contact with one another during the mother’s imprisonment, the prison service is in control of the types, dates, times, and duration of the contact available and the child’s carer(s)²⁸ become responsible for agreeing to and facilitating this contact (Booth 2018). There may also be circumstances where social services can determine the types and frequency of – or prevent - contact between mothers and their children (Baldwin 2021), as is the case in most of the work I have done with imprisoned fathers. Flynn (2012) argues that this sense of diminished responsibility often results in a sense of powerless for imprisoned mothers who feel as though they no longer have control over their relationships with, or the decisions made regarding, their children. She argues that this feeling is often heightened if the mother has a strained relationship with her child’s carer (Flynn 2012).

Aiello and McQueeney (2021:109) support this argument further and argue that as imprisoned mothers often lose control over the everyday lives and routines of their children the power dynamic of their relationships shift, as someone else takes on their role in the community. They developed the term ‘ambivalent gratitude’ to describe the somewhat conflicting feeling of being both “grateful to caregivers for caring for and helping them stay connected to their children” whilst also “being critical of their parenting practices and believed they could parent better” (McQueeney 2022:114). The identity of mother is thus redefined during imprisonment and imprisoned mothers must develop new ways of understanding and doing mothering whilst

²⁸ Note, Booth (2020) acknowledges that ‘care’ is not solely defined in relation to who a child lives with, but that wider familial networks are also often involved in providing collective support.

shackled by the bureaucratic rules and restrictive physical environments of the prison service, other social agencies and familial dynamics (Baldwin 2018; Easterling et al 2018).

Easterling et al (2018) rework Boss's (1999:4) concept of "ambiguous loss" which was originally developed to explore the absence felt in cases of dementia ("where people are physically present but psychologically absent") and missing relatives ("where people are physically missing but cannot be mourned"). They state imprisoned mothers must learn how to negotiate the ambiguous loss of being psychologically present within their children's lives whilst simultaneously being physically apart from them and it is managing this emotional contradiction that is argued to result in the redefining of motherhood (Easterling et al 2018). Through qualitative interviews with thirty-five predominately White mothers imprisoned in America, Easterling et al (2018: 8-14) identified three main perceptions, that being the mothers felt that during imprisonment they were: "the same mom" (7/35), "a modified mom" (17/35) or a "suspended mom" (11/35).

In Easterling et al's research (2018), women who identified as 'the same mom' believed they should mother whilst imprisoned in the same way as they had done in the community, despite this often being highly difficult and challenging (Easterling et al 2018). The 'modified moms' group represented the highest number of mothers. These mothers felt their mothering identities had changed due to imprisonment and described shifting their mothering responsibilities to their close friends and relatives (Easterling et al 2018). Emphasis amongst these women was placed upon reassuming their mothering role after imprisonment (Easterling et al 2018). The 'suspended mom' group represented women who undertook very little to no mothering responsibilities whilst imprisoned. These women either found it too upsetting to think about their children, were more likely to have older children or felt they needed to concentrate their own recovery (see also Fuentes 2022) before they could actively mother (Easterling et al 2018:14). As only one mother from the 'suspended mom' group had cited living with her children before her imprisonment (Easterling et al 2018), these findings may not reflect a redefining of motherhood, but rather such findings could reflect a continuation of mothering experiences pre-imprisonment.

The continuation of restricted mothering is also recognised by Baldwin (2015) who argues that many imprisoned mothers may have struggled to meet the social expectations associated with motherhood before their imprisonment due to economic marginalisation, domestic abuse and housing precarity. For mothers who are already marginalised within society, prison thus becomes another experience in their lives that may restrict their ability to mother in a way considered appropriate by the standards of wider society. This is reflected in Baldwin's (2018:3) interview with Mary who entered prison with the view that she was "already a failing mother" and felt that receiving a custodial sentence had confirmed her already established perception of herself; as detailed in her reflection "*Good mothers don't go to prison do they?*".

Identity salience theory, developed by Stryker (1980), suggests that individuals are made up of multiple identities, however, these identities are hierarchical as we attribute certain identities with more 'salience' than others depending on differing contexts. Identity salience theory is thus argued to be useful for understanding the redefinition of mothering identities as a result of criminalisation or imprisonment. For example, as the identities of 'prisoner' and 'mother' are argued to be socially constructed as oppositional, imprisoned mothers may experience a strained relationship with motherhood whilst 'criminalised' or 'prisoner' identities are heightened (Barnes and Stringer 2014).

As highlighted in section 3.3, mothers are argued to face '*maternal pains*' during imprisonment due to the trauma of separation, feelings of guilt as well as social stigma (Easterling and Feldmeyer 2018; Williams et al 2021). In her interviews with twenty mothers and grandmothers, Baldwin (2018) also describes a similar phenomenon of mothers distancing themselves from their children to manage their emotions during imprisonment. Baldwin (2018) highlights the experiences of Carla who attempted to reduce her feelings of sadness by taking the photographs of her children down so she wouldn't have to be visually reminded of her loss every day. This demonstrates the highly emotive context of the prison environment in which *normal every day* activities associated with mothering, such as displaying and looking at pictures of your children (Rose 2010), become burdened with the unpleasant feelings of "despair", "anger", "grief", "loss", "frustration", guilt, upset and "shame" (Baldwin 2018, p .4).

Feelings of guilt and shame are arguably underpinned by the inaccessibility of ‘good mothering’ identities for many imprisoned mothers. Barnes and Stringer (2014) argue that the identities of ‘prisoner’ and ‘mother’ are oppositional as the identity of a ‘good mother’ is often associated with traditional idealisations of nurture and care – as underpinned by “White, middle-class, heterosexual values” (Fuentes 2022:1) – which are far removed from the often-reductive social understandings associated with ‘prisoner’ identities. Baldwin (2018) found that if imprisoned mothers felt that staff were critical or disapproving of their relationships with their children they were more likely to perceive themselves as bad mothers, demonstrating the impact of societal judgement on self-perception (see also Williams et al 2021). Imprisoned mothers who feel as though they are bad mothers may therefore emotionally distance themselves from their children as a coping mechanism to mitigate feelings of guilt and disapproval (Shamaid and Rinat-Billy 2008; Baldwin 2018; Easterling et al 2018).

Fuentes (2022) constructed ‘the struggling good mother’ model based on interviews with 21 imprisoned mothers in America, 14 of whom identified as Black. She found that whilst many imprisoned mothers valued more traditional mothering identities they also rationalised and justified their engagement in behaviours that stood in contention to these ideals (Fuentes 2022). The model of the ‘struggling good mother’ thus “situates women’s mothering experiences in the context of their pathways (via trauma and marginalisation) that result in their criminalisation” which enables deviance to be understood as “choiceless choices made by marginalised women lacking the resources required for obtaining traditional ‘good’ mother goals” (Fuentes 2022:3). Fuentes (2022) acknowledges that ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mothering identities are not necessarily fixed categories as what may be viewed as ‘bad mothering’ behaviours by some may not necessarily be viewed this way by the mothers who have had to engage in such behaviours in response to trauma or for survival. Mothers may therefore simultaneously value and accept societal constructions of ‘good mothering’ whilst also resisting and redefining them in response to their own needs and experiences. Whilst this section has focused on mothering identities and emotions more broadly, in the subsequent section I focus on how processes of racialisation may intersect with such experiences.

3.10 Black Mothering, Stigma and Imprisonment

When thinking about access to ‘good mothering identities’ during imprisonment it is also important to acknowledge that other identities held by imprisoned mothers may also shape their experiences of, and perceptions surrounding mothering (Baldwin 2021; Williams et al 2021). Writing in America, Ocen (2012:1254) argues, “Women incarcerated in institutions are unable to adhere to White middle- class normative standards of ‘womanhood’ and are therefore deemed unfit to be mothers as a result of the intersection of their race, gender, class, and incarcerated status”. Black mothering identities even outside of contexts of imprisonment have historically been devalued, challenged and reprimanded within societies that value traditionally White, middle classed and heterosexual constructions of ‘good mothering’ (Ocen 2022; Williams et al 2021). Imprisonment is thus experienced as an additional strain, or continuation on from, the racialised marginalisation of Black mothering experiences pre-imprisonment. Furthermore, Willingham (2011) highlights how even following release, Black mothers in America are still impacted by the social processes of marginalisation that challenge their ability to care for their children, highlighting the persistent nature of such oppression.

It is also important to consider how constructions of Black motherhood within Black communities may also shape imprisoned Black mothers’ experiences and the way they perceive themselves. Academic literature frequently argues that within Black communities, Black mothers are celebrated and valued as independent and strong women, whose main objectives are supporting and protecting their children (see Elliott and Reid 2016). The identity of ‘*prisoner*’ may therefore conflict with this perception of ‘*the good Black mother*’ resulting in a spoiling effect upon their mothering identities (Goffman 1968). This argument challenges Easterling and Feldmeyer’s (2018) suggestion that Black mothers may not face cultural stigma from their communities due the ‘commonality’ of their imprisonment. In her research, Willingham (2011:60) explores the impact of imprisonment on Black mothering identities in America. One of her participants, a Black woman who been imprisoned for twenty-four years imprisoned, explained that following periods of imprisonment Black men were often welcomed back by their communities and celebrated compared to Black women who were rendered bad mothers who could no longer be trusted (Willingham 2011).

This type of marginalisation is also recognised in Baldwin's (2021:227) thesis where she refers to the experience of Kady, a Black mother, who had been told by her Black probation officer that "she had 'let her race down' by going to prison. This statement reflects the stigma experienced by Black mothers who are perceived to 'confirm' stereotypes that associate Black womanhood with deviancy and criminality. Kady was thus made to feel "guilty not only as a mum... but as a Black mum too" (Baldwin 2021:227), with the shame associated with being an imprisoned mother becoming entangled with racialised and cultural expectations surrounding Black femininity and motherhood. Black mothers may thus face marginalisation from their own communities for their perceived failure to meet expectations of Black motherhood (Willingham 2011; Roberts 2012) as well as from wider society which may continue to reprimand them for appearing to 'confirm' stereotypes that associate Black motherhood with criminality, both resulting in heightened feelings of stigma and shame (Willingham 2011: Baldwin 2021). This is supported by Williams et al (2021:1126), writing in America, who acknowledge that for Black mothers after imprisonment, reclaiming mothering is:

...not just the physical custody or physical motherhood of their children, but rather the psychological sense of self that is intricately linked to their role and performance as mothers. It does not just involve how Black women see themselves, but their perceptions of how society sees them, including their (sub)conscious internalisations of the stereotypical trope of the bad Black incarcerated/felon mother. Thus, the reflections of others impact their sense of self too.

The subsequent section explores racialised experiences of mothering and imprisonment in more depth and focuses specifically on approaches to mothering *after* release.

3.11 Mothering Post-Release

According to Opsal (2015:189-190), "prisons seldom effectively address the needs of the women they house" but rather often heighten, and create new, experiences of marginalisation post-release. Such experiences of marginalisation are argued to be shaped not only by contexts of imprisonment but also societal constructions of race, gender and motherhood which "converge to create additional or unique experiences [for women] post-incarceration" (Opsal 2015:189). In their interviews with 10 Black women who had been imprisoned in the women's prison estate in England, regarding their resettlements needs, Owens (2010) identified a

common theme that experiences of racism in the women's everyday lives intensified the stigma associated with their imprisonment, creating additional barriers to resettlement (or settlement) post-release. The research also highlighted several areas that Black women felt they needed more support with post-release, these included but were not limited to housing, benefits, education, employment, mental health, understanding their rights, childcare and child reunification (Owens 2010). More recent research has also identified the barriers that Black and minoritised women with criminal convictions in England and Wales disproportionately face within employment due to discriminations that sit at intersections of race, gender and criminalisation (Working Chance 2021).

Regarding women more broadly, O'Brien (2001:291) emphasises the importance housing, employment, relationships and self-confidence for women re-entering the community after imprisonment however she also acknowledges that such needs are often heightened for mothers who may "need to meet specific requirements" to regain custody of, or provide support to, their children post-release (see also Opsal 2015). Concerning mothering emotions and mental wellbeing, Baldwin (2017b) argues that the pains of imprisonment experienced by mothers do not end with the prison sentence but extend and persist long after release (see also Baldwin 2021). Reflecting on her research findings she outlines how "Released mothers described feeling that their good mothering identity was forever tarnished" and that they continued to experience "similar emotions" to when they had been imprisoned despite reunification with their children (Baldwin 2017b:7). Some mothers had thus chosen not to tell their children or grandchildren about their imprisonment out of fear of further judgement.

In acknowledgment that there is very little academic research focused on Black mothers' experience post-release, Gurusami's (2019) research considers the impact that state surveillance, child welfare services, poverty and violence in American have on Black mothering practices post-release. Drawing upon Collin's (1994) concept of motherwork, Gurusami (2019:134) argues that Black mothers under the surveillance of social workers, parole and probation officers must adapt their mothering practices to protect their children and often

engage in “three types of fluid and context-specific decarceral²⁹ motherwork” that being: “Collective Motherwork”, “Hypervigilant Motherwork” and “Crisis Motherwork”.

Gurusami (2019) describes ‘Collective Motherwork’ as the sharing of caregiving between Black mothering networks to distribute mothering labour and support one another. ‘Hypervigilant Motherwork’ encompasses Black mothering practices that focus on protecting children from harm in their communities (in relation to poverty, “violence and instability” and heightened surveillance by the state (Gurusami 2019). This type of motherwork includes the mothering behaviour of “hovering” over children to ensure their wellbeing and safety (Gurusami 2019:135). ‘Crisis Motherwork’ is a form of motherwork that Gurusami (2019) explains often occurs when hypervigilant motherwork is no longer perceived to be enough. This form of motherwork thus involves mothers disengaging from all other obligations (such as paid work) to focus on mothering and ensuring the safety of their children. All three types of motherwork thus represent how many previously imprisoned Black mothers, especially those living in poverty, must navigate mothering in the face of disproportionate state-intervention and threats of violence within their communities.

Through their research with five previously imprisoned Black mothers in America, Mitchell and Davis (2019) also discuss the development of mothering strategies which are centered around ensuring the survival of Black mothers and their children. Their research findings are separated into three themes that being “safety”, “education” and “housing” (Mitchell and Davis 2019:426-428). ‘Safety’ refers to the emphasis that the mothers placed on watching over their children and mothering them closely to protect them from potential harm such as victimisation from peers or authorities, child criminal exploitation and state intervention. Mitchell and Davis (2019:427) also highlight how identity nurturing was also considered an important factor in ensuring the safety of children, as one mother, Linda stated she wanted her sons to grow up to “know [their] power” as Black men with the hope that this would prepare them for some of the challenges they may face in the future. ‘Education’ reflects the mothers’ focus on ensuring that their children were receiving a “quality” education often intending to break

²⁹ Motherwork that takes places after imprisonment and aims to address the harm it may have caused.

“intergenerational cycles” of educational disadvantage (Mitchell and Davis 2019:427). Finally, some of the mothers also discussed the difficulty of securing housing with a criminal record and no income, with one mother detailing how she had called sixty-two people and only three of these had agreed to engage with her. Similar to Gurusami’s (2019) research, therefore, Black mothering post-release is understood as responsive to structural harm and racial injustice.

It is also necessary to acknowledge that not all previously imprisoned mothers take on the primary care of their children post-release. Wilson (2021a:10) conducted in-depth interviews with 14 imprisoned mothers in America, eight of whom were primary caregivers’ pre-imprisonment and seven whom planned to “reunify and care” for their children post-release. However, Wilson (2021a:10) found that for four mothers, reunification was not necessarily linked to the resumption of a mothering role but was rather understood as associated with the “intention” of having a relationship with their children post-release. Reasons for this separation between reunification and care was often underpinned by mothers foreseeing challenges related to regaining custody of their children in foster care or the acknowledgment that children may be more appropriately cared for by someone else. It was also found that mothers who had positive relationships with their child’s caregiver in the community were also less concerned about the possibility and technicalities of child reunification. However, most academic literature discussed in this section - especially literature relating to Black motherhood and mothering - reflects the social, political and cultural contexts of America. More research is thus needed to better understand the experiences of Black mothers in Britain, post-release.

3.12 Conceptualising Time

To support an understanding of Black mothers’ narratives before, during and after imprisonment it is also important to review academic literature that explores the different ways in which ‘time’ comes to be shaped by different contexts of surveillance, regulation and confinement. This is particularly important for recognising how the mothers’ narrated experiences of their pasts, presents and futures in this thesis can provide textured insights into the racialised and gendered constructions of prison and post-prison *time* (Middlemass and Smiley 2016). According to Flaherty (1999:5), time is not an abstract or objective reality that

exists independently of our individual selves or collective societies, as “what feels like minutes to one person may feel like hours to another” (see also Carceral and Flaherty 2021). Our individual feelings and experiences as well as the situational and structural conditions that surround us thus shape how we perceive and interpret the passing of time (Flaherty 1999), demonstrating time as a social construct (Carceral and Flaherty 2021).

The situational relationship between time and prison has been well-established within existing academic literature and experiences of prison time (also known as prison timescapes) have been explored and conceptualised in different ways (see for example, Carceral and Flaherty 2021; Martinez 2020; Baldwin 2018; Middlemass and Smiley 2016; Moran 2012; Wahidin 2006; Leder 2000). In her review of academic publications, Moran (2012:311) highlights how experiences of prison time are most straightforwardly defined by objective forms of “clock time”. Within the prison context, clock time is used to refer to the length of time that individuals are sentenced to serve, as measured quantitatively “in years, months, weeks and days” (Moran 2012:311). Within the criminal justice system, therefore, clock time is a form of punishment in and of itself, as those who are imprisoned are sentenced to time (Carceral and Flaherty 2021). This relationship between clock time and punishment is reflected in the colloquial term “doing time” which refers to the serving of a custodial sentence (Middlemass and Smiley 2016).

Importantly, however, time is not simply a measurable entity that comes to be defined by the construction of the ‘clock’. Wahidin (2006: 5) argues, “In doing time, time can be harnessed, disciplined, forfeited ... gained ..., negotiated, managed, survived and feared”. Time is therefore experienced in multiple and complex ways through imprisonment. It can be experienced as an additional means of punishment through extra days being added to one’s sentence or through the delaying of freedom, as restricting and controlling one’s behaviour through the temporally organised and calculated prison regime, as disorientating due to feelings of boredom and limitlessness and as something that can be resisted through the development of strategies that help to ‘pass the time’ (Carceral and Flaherty 2021; Moran 2012; Wahidin 2006). It is therefore not just the ‘clock’ that defines the experience of prison time, but also individual perceptions and situational conditions that create and construct its’ textures.

In framing time as a social construct, existing academic literature has also explored how time comes to be subjectively experienced as distorted, slowed and lost. In her article based on 90 in-depth interviews with men and women aged 50-85 across a range of different prison settings, Wahidin (2006) details the experience of a mother who due to being imprisoned was not able to see her daughter grow up, resulting in a lost - or perhaps missed (see section 7.3.3) - experience of her transition into adulthood. Time in prison thus is experienced as standing still whilst it continues on in the outside world, ultimately becoming lost by those in prison. This is further supported by Middlemass and Smiley (2016) who interviewed 34 people in the community who had lived experience of imprisonment and found many of their narratives included reflections of 'lost time', especially in relation to time lost with children.

It is necessary here to acknowledge the gendered textures of prison time (see Moran 2012) and the particular temporal impacts of imprisonment for mothers. In addition to Wahidin (2006), Baldwin (2018) also highlights maternal experiences of prison time and space in her research informed by 20 in-depth interviews with mothers post-release. Baldwin (2018:54) draws upon the following quote from Rita, a mother who had previously been imprisoned to illustrate how, for mothers in prison, imprisonment is often experienced as time lost with their children, resulting in a particularly weighted experience of temporal reality (see also Moran 2012):

... imagine how that felt locked in your cell for hours and hours... You just feel so disconnected, not part of their lives, their lives were going on without ... I wanted their lives to go on and them to cope of course I did ... but I just felt redundant... like I had no purpose

Baldwin (2018) goes on to explain that to mitigate against feelings of guilt, redundancy and pointlessness Rita chose to get a job in the prison. This job was felt to make time go faster and feel easier, as Rita was able to spend more time out of her cell and less time thinking about the conditions of her confinement (Baldwin 2018). This supports Carceral and Flaherty's (2021) argument that prison time can be slowed or quickened by situational conditions and individual strategies of resistance, further evidencing time as a social construct.

It is also interesting to consider temporal constructions of pasts, presents and futures in relation to narratives of imprisoned mothering. Morris (2018) draws upon the concept of 'hauntology' in her research to conceptualise the experiences of mothers who had experienced a child being removed from their care. Hauntology refers to how temporal pasts and anticipated futures haunt and shape experiences of the present (Derrida 1994). Morris (2018:828) argues that women who have had children removed often experience a state of "haunted motherhood" in that their temporal perception of the present is entangled with hopes for future reunification and memories of the past, "their children are there and yet not there ... living and yet out of reach". Whilst Morris' (2018) findings do not relate specifically to experiences of imprisonment, she makes frequent connections to literature relating to prison time in her article. For example, she draws upon Leder's (2000:86) research which highlights how for people in prison reflections of the past or imaginings of the future can be a strategy for mental relief as the present - defined by its stillness, isolation and loss - "is the most painful" temporal experience. The concept of hauntology, therefore, supports an understanding of how pasts, presents and futures can be experienced as temporally interconnected with one another.

As the texture of time is shaped by the situational and structural conditions of society, it is also essential to highlight how prison time also comes to be experienced "as a site of racial disadvantage" (Miles 2023: 5). Thus, meaning racism also shapes the textures of prison time. For example, Martinez et al (2020) and Miles (2023:5) acknowledge how processes of remand and mandatory prison sentences in America exacerbate experiences of "racial temporal disadvantage", as people racialised as non-White are disproportionately sentenced to more clock time. This argument is also relevant to this thesis, as Black women are not only disproportionately sentenced to 'time' in prison, through both remand and custodial sentences, but they are also more likely to serve longer custodial sentences than women racialised as White (see sections 1.4 and 3.2). Mahadeo (2019) thus argues that harmful societal stereotypes which associate Blackness with criminality are often used to rationalise the disproportionate intervention, surveillance and imprisonment of Black people but it is also these constructions that are drawn upon to justify the racialised 'stealing' of time.

However, it is necessary to mention here that “racial temporal disadvantage” (Miles 2023:5) is not only reflected in racialised textures of prison time. It is also evident in the experiences of Black children who must *wait* for the return of their imprisoned parents, of Black mothers who may *miss* time with their children due to disproportionate rates of social service intervention as well as in school suspension rates that disproportionately result in the missed educations of Black children (Miles 2023). This subsection thus provides a framework for conceptualising the different ways that time - and textures of time - may be constructed within Black mothers’ narratives when reflecting upon their lives before, during and after imprisonment. However, by focusing on the intersections between ‘racialisation’ and ‘mothering’, this thesis will provide a new and specific insight into both *racialised* and *gendered* textures of prison and post-prison time.

3.13 Summary and Research Questions

This chapter has reviewed a wide range of literature regarding women’s imprisonment relating to processes of criminalisation and imprisonment, the pains of imprisonment, the intersections between racialisation and gender within understandings of imprisonment, the prevalence of misogynoir, the sentencing of mothers and Black women, pregnancy and early motherhood, the impacts of imprisonment on children and families, mothering identities and emotions and resuming mothering in the community. However, as there is currently no recent literature that focuses *specifically* on the diverse experiences of Black mothers’ during and after imprisonment in the women’s prison estate in England the following research questions have been developed:

1. In what ways do Black mothers narrate their experiences of imprisonment?
2. In what ways do Black mothers narrate their expectations, experiences and hopes of life after release from prison?
3. From the perspective of Black mothers, what changes to current policy and practice could better support mothers currently or previously imprisoned in the women’s prison estate?

Chapter Four

Black Feminist Narrative Methodologies and Methodological Reflections

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reflects on some of the methodological considerations involved in developing an appropriate approach for hearing and understanding Black mothers' experiences during and after imprisonment. I begin the chapter by discussing the narrative and Black feminist philosophical underpinnings of this research. I then outline the process of navigating entry into the prison estate for interviewing purposes with subsequent subsections focusing on the original target population and my initial (and intended) approaches to recruitment. I then acknowledge the restrictive impacts of Covid-19 on prisons research and detail the adjustments I made to my overall research design due to such rest unforeseen circumstances, with attention also given to the ethical considerations underpinning the research process. This is followed by an exploration of the narrative interviewing techniques I utilised for data production, justification for the use of background information to assist my analysis and an introduction to the mothers who participated in this research. I then reflect upon the importance of *situating* narrative and thinking reflexively about the research process. In the final section, I outline my approach to conducting a Black feminist narrative analysis which foregrounds my three findings and discussion chapters.

4.2 Research Philosophy

According to McAdams and McLean (2013:233) "human beings are natural storytellers" who by reflecting upon memories of their past and imagining their possible futures can convey to their listeners *how* and *why* they assign meaning to their identities, life events and experiences. Storytelling is thus argued to be the "foundation of qualitative research" (Banks-Wallace 2002:410) as non-calculable methods are used to provide a rich and detailed insight into the subjective experiences and self-perceptions of its tellers; whilst also reflecting the social, historical, political and cultural contexts in which they have been created (Etherington 2004; Collins 1991; Kouyate 1989; McAdams 1993). Narrative methods view the interactive process of storytelling as a way of understanding the complex and contextualised ways in which

“people make sense of their lives” (Rosenberg 2010:110; Bruner 1986; Whitecross 2021a). In this sense, stories are effective qualitative data sources, re-presenting social reality and personal identity as experienced, interpreted, edited and vocalised by its tellers in a specific time and space (Etherington 2004; Nadar 2014).

4.2.1 Narrative Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology refers to the way that individuals conceptualise the nature of their being (Sommers 1994). Narrative ontology more specifically assumes that individuals use stories to make sense of their lives. By taking our life events and characteristics, and episodically ordering them to make a story for ourselves, we come to ‘know’ who we are and what we mean within our social world (Sommers 1994). The way that we act in a particular social context is guided by the way that we narrate our place within that social situation. As a result, narrative ontology does not view the self as something rigid or fixed but instead as “something that one becomes” (Sommers 1994:618). Depending on where we are, who we are with or what we are doing our sense of self is ever changing thereby highlighting its dependency on time and place (Caine et al 2013).

When we interact with other people an interactional narrative is developed between us that allows us to recognise who we are in relation to one another, which may in turn change the way that we once knew ourselves. Caine et al (2013:576) summarises “it is through story that people are able to understand, make meaning of, and relate experiences, because story is how people make sense of their existence” (see also Fleetwood 2015; Presser 2016). A narrative ontological approach was consequently considered the most appropriate stance for this research as it enabled Black mothering identities and experiences to be thought of as something shaped by each woman’s immediate environment as well as their personal and shared histories as Black mothers. However, in contrast to more traditional narrative criminological approaches, primarily concerned with personal stories of offending for understanding crime and desistance (see Maruna 2001; Presser 2016), this thesis focuses on stories of imprisonment, institutional oppression and marginalisation to more closely acknowledge structural and systemic harm (see also Whitecross 2021a).

Whilst ontology refers to the nature of reality, epistemology gives attention to *how* knowledge comes to be produced (Sommers 1994; McAdams and McLean 2013). Narrative epistemology is concerned with understanding the way that certain individuals or groups make sense of their own and/or others' identities, experiences, and feelings through the creation of narrative (McAdams and McLean 2013). Adopting this approach allowed for Black mothering identities and experiences surrounding imprisonment to be made sense of and discussed from the perspective of Black mothers themselves. By autobiographically storying their key memories, setbacks, turning points and future goals, the mothers interviewed create a "coherent account" of their mothering identities in light of imprisonment, providing qualitative insight into the impact prison has on narrative identity construction (see Livo and Reitz 1986; McAdams and McLean 2013:233; Stevens 2012). This research thus sets out to develop a narrative epistemological understanding of what it means to be a Black mother within the context of the women's English prison estate as well as wider society after release.

Importantly, the construction of narrative not only reflects how tellers perceive themselves and their experiences but also how they want their listeners to perceive them and how they are heard (Rosenberg 2010). Researcher reflexivity is considered a vital aspect of narrative epistemology, with emphasis placed on the interactional aspect of storytelling between tellers, listeners and wider society (Banks-Wallace 2002; Rosenberg 2010; Stalker 2009). By acknowledging the entanglement between researchers, research subjects and research contexts during the creation of narrative, narrative epistemology validates an exploration of the highly personal, fluid, and complex nature of meaning-making (Polkinghorne 2007). Narrative epistemology thus challenges more positivist approaches to knowledge production which, in pursuit of finding objective "truths" and determining scientific causality, seek to separate researcher values, presuppositions, and positionalities from the research process (Hudson and Ozanne 1998; Polkinghorne 2007).

Positivist researchers attempt to "stand outside [of their] object of inquiry" to produce definite, reliable and replicable knowledge (Hudson and Ozanne 1988:513). However, narrative researchers position themselves within their subjects of inquiry as knowledge is seen to be relative to their personal interaction with their participants within a specific time and space, rendering the positivist goals of reliability, validity, replicability and generalisability insignificant

(Polkinghorne 2007). Thomas and Magilvy (2011:152-154) emphasise how in qualitative research, academic rigour is instead maintained through research goals such as, but not limited to, “depth” (gaining a highly detailed understanding of a particular experience in a particular context with few participants), “dependability” (ensuring the research methods are clearly outlined and justified) and “confirmability” (reflecting on ones’ own impact on the research process and findings). I therefore provide a clear description and justification of my research methods in this chapter which support an in-depth understanding of Black mothering and imprisonment as well as reflecting upon reflect upon my own positioning within the research process to acknowledge my influence on the narratives produced and my interpretation of them (see section 4.10).

It is also accepted that like most stories, woven between the lines of Black mothers’ expressed narratives there may be “real”, “imagined” and hidden experiences and emotions (Fleetwood 2015:371). These may be purposefully fabricated in attempt to portray a desired version of her character or story, subconsciously edited, perhaps as a means of self-protection, or affected by poor memory recall. However, this research is not concerned with whether parts of the story are necessarily fiction or fact. Instead, importance is placed upon understanding why the teller has chosen to tell her particular story, in this way; and what can this tell us about the way she views herself, her listener and her experiences during and after imprisonment (Coles 1989; Fleetwood 2015; Lawless 2001; McAdams 1993; Stevens 2012). This is in keeping with a narrative epistemological approach to knowledge production which sets out to understand the subjective ways that people experience, interpret, and communicate their social worlds within their broader social contexts (Bruner 1986; McAdams 1993; Polkinghorne 2007). Truth is not thought of in the positivist sense of scientific fact but is instead conceptualised as an individual’s subjective understanding of their social world. I now turn to focusing on the relationship between Black feminist thought and storytelling as a means of justifying the Black feminist narrative approach to research utilised in this thesis.

4.2.2 Black Feminist Thought and Storytelling

“Maybe stories are just data with soul”

Brown (2010, np)

Black feminist thought developed out of the critique that traditional Western approaches to knowledge production were underpinned by the interests and values of elite White men who saw Black female bodies as objects of study rather than subjects of knowledge (Collins 1991; Mirza 1997). Black women were often studied and understood using elite “White male interpretations of the world” resulting in a simplification, misrepresentation and condemnation of their experiences (Collins 1991:201; Willingham 2011). An example of this can be seen in the Moynihan Report (1965), originally titled ‘The Negro Family: The Case for National Action’ in which Black mothers and their families were argued to be a pathological problem in society in need of correcting. The measures used to assess pathological problems in the report were based on masculine, White and middle-class standards inevitably rendering Black cultural norms deviant. Black feminists thus set out to produce and validate knowledge that was reflective of the differing values, interests and social positions held by Black women themselves (see Collins 1991; Lewis 2020; Mannheim 1936; Mayor 2009), with their experiences positioned at the very “core of Black feminist thought” (Willingham 2011:58).

Experience is defined within Black feminist thought as something both “personal” and “contextual” (Nadar 2014:25) suggesting there are multiple and differing ways of assigning meaning to our lives depending upon our own individual experiences, histories and backgrounds (Few et al 2003; Collins 1991; Maylor 2009; Serrant-Green 2002; Willingham 2011). In this research emphasis is placed on understanding both *personal* and *shared* experiences surrounding Black maternal imprisonment. The mothers’ narratives are understood as not only reflecting their shared identities as Black mothers, but also of their individual social backgrounds, nationalities, sexualities, complexions, life histories and parental responsibilities (see also Farmer 2019). Differences in experience are given prominence in this research to ensure that the diversity found within Black mothers’ narratives are not rendered invisible through an overly reductionist pursuit of shared understanding. Subjectivity is thus privileged, as capturing the complexity of Black maternal experience of imprisonment and is favoured over the pursuit of a single objective ‘truth’. In doing so, an understanding is

established that is unapologetically unique to, and reflective of, Black mothers' both personal and shared interpretations of their experiences of imprisonment and the meaning that it currently has in their lives.

Importantly, Black feminist scholarship also places great importance on understanding, and writing into research, how subjectivity, positionality and social context shapes research processes, as Nnaemeka (2003:363) writes:

...Feminist discourse raises crucial questions about knowledge not only as being but as becoming, not only as a construct but as a construction, not only as a product but as a process ... By injecting issues of subjectivity and location into epistemological debates, feminist scholarship seeks ... to put a human face on what is called a body of knowledge.

It is apparent that Black feminist scholarship is as concerned with method as it is with findings, with the two being positioned as inseparable from one another. As a result, emphasis is placed on the context of the research process being *seen* and not masked. Consequently, thought is not only given to the subjective experiences of Black imprisoned mothers, as narrated by Black mothers themselves, but also the ways in which I (a Black-mixed-race woman researcher³⁰) have shaped the research process, as well as the wider social contexts and immediate environments in which the mothers' narratives were produced and re-shared.

Many Black feminist scholars have also recognised the potentially liberating nature of narrative (Amoah 1997; Banks-Wallace 1994; Camp 2004; hooks³¹ 1989; Potter 2006). For Black mothers, whose racialised narratives have been rendered practically invisible within mainstream dialogues concerning imprisonment, the sharing of their stories within this research provides a space for them to be heard, as Willingham (2011:59) observes: "If Black

³⁰ Though not without fault or contention, the term 'mixed-race' is often used to describe individuals whose parents are categorised as belonging to different racialised backgrounds (Bennett 2010; Campion 2019; Daniel et al 2014; Lewis 2020; Sims and Joseph-Salisbury 2019). I place emphasis on the 'Black' within my multiracial identity as I have frequently been racialised by others in this way, demonstrating the social nature of identity formation and experience.

³¹ Capitalisation is not used when referring to bell hooks in keeping with hook's own presentation of her name.

women do not write their own stories they will continue to be pushed to the side as an afterthought, instead of positioned at the forefront of, and included in, discussions about incarcerated women". However, hooks (1989) highlights, Black feminist research must not simply focus on the telling or sharing of stories but must prioritise an active engagement with the content within them. Emphasis in this thesis is thus placed on understanding storytelling as a means of challenging dominant discourses of imprisonment which exclude Black mothers, as well as the oppressive institution of imprisonment itself.

Nadar (2014) and Lu and Steele (2019) suggest that within Black feminist and African feminist epistemologies, as well as Black oral culture more broadly³², the assembling of lived experiences, thoughts and emotions into coherent story structures have historically provided credible insights into the way that people make sense of their social worlds. Quotes directly from the narratives of Black mothers are therefore incorporated throughout this thesis to represent their stories in their own words, uphold their voices as credible sources of knowledge whilst also acknowledging the wider power-dynamics that may define and constrain such narratives (hooks 1989; Phillip and Earle 2010). Whilst I have explored in detail the theoretical-methodological underpinnings of this research, the following two sections reflect upon the more practical research processes which also shaped how the mothers' narratives were produced.

4.3 Prisons Research

In keeping with Black feminist narrative approaches to understanding, emphasis was initially³³ placed on producing highly in-depth and detailed narratives reflecting the experiences of Black mothers at the time of their imprisonment. Situating the research within the prison environment was considered important as it would allow for narratives to be representative of Black mothers' experiences at the time of their imprisonment and contextualise mothering narratives within the immediate environment being discussed (see section 4.9). In this section, I detail the practicalities of conducting, and attempting to conduct, research with Black

³² Lu and Steele (2019) highlight how written and oral narratives were used to challenge slavery through supporting kinship ties, strengthening a sense of community and acting as a form of political resistance.

³³See section 4.4 which details the changes made to the initial research plan.

mothers across two different prison sites: the open conditions³⁴ of HMP Greenhill³⁵ (see appendix one) and the closed conditions of HMP Scarlet Oak which also housed a MBU (see appendix two). These two prison sites are referred to using fictitious names to protect their anonymity. The use of these fictional names also serves to create a sense of familiarity with these otherwise nameless institutions where, in the case of HMP Greenhill, mothering narratives were told, listened to, and produced.

4.3.1 Ethical Approval and Navigating Access

Prisons are kept physically secluded and bureaucratically closed off from the rest of society making them a challenging institution within which to conduct research (Reitker 2014). Not only are they built to keep imprisoned people structurally secluded, behind high walls, locked doors, and barred windows, but they are also positioned within a system that requires the passing of Disclosure and Barring Service checks, gaining Her/His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) ethical approval based on a research application to the National Research Committee (NRC)³⁶ as well as the subjective authorisation of onsite gatekeepers to gain access as an external researcher (Smith and Wincup 2000). Prisons are highly political and managerial institutions with research access often depending upon the current political climate, as well as the business priorities and research agendas set by HMPPS (Jewkes and Wright 2016; King and Liebling 2008). When setting out to conduct prison research, therefore, it must be accepted that access is not guaranteed (Stevens 2020).

To gain bureaucratic access to the prison estate it is beneficial for one's research to reflect the priorities set by HMPPS. As a result, prison research will almost always reflect what the prison service wants to know or at least sees some value in knowing (Stevens 2020). This argument is reflected in my decision letter from HMPPS National Research Committee granting me conditional permission to conduct prisons research. The letter stated that to progress with the

³⁵ Prison sites are referred to using fictitious names protect their anonymity. The use of these fictional names also serves to create a sense of familiarity with these otherwise nameless institutions where, in the case of HMP Greenhill, mothering narratives were told, listened to, and produced.

³⁶ All people wanting to conduct research with people or staff in prisons or the Probation Service must formally apply to the HMPPS NRC for approval.

research I must first comply with their condition of visiting at least one prison with an MBU. This was necessitated due to a “particular interest in the MOJ/HMPPS in knowing more about the lived experiences of Black mothers seeking a place, currently residing on... or having applied and not been accepted” to a MBU (appendix three). As gatekeepers, HMPPS National Research Committee not only had the power to permit my access to, the prison estate but they were also able to control what was researched within it (King and Liebling 2008).

Despite gaining approval from HMPPS National Research Committee, and from Cardiff University’s Social Science Research Ethics Committee (see appendix four), it is still at the discretion of each separate prison to grant access to their institution. Within the current political and economic climate of the penal estate, prisons have a lot to lose by letting researchers in, as they open themselves up to potential criticism and scrutiny (King and Liebling 2008). The academic literature highlights the importance of building relationships with gatekeepers within potential research sites to increase the likelihood of being granted entry (Jewkes and Wright 2016). Prior to applying to HMPPS, I thus contacted three prisons requesting access for research scoping, however this was also an opportunity to make contacts within prisons.

After difficulty getting through to relevant staff across several different prisons, I decided that as a volunteer providing family support within a men’s prison, opening a dialogue with staff within the same charity across the women’s prison estate may be a good way ‘in’. This approach worked as two staff members based at different prisons agreed to meet with me on site. On one particular visit, I travelled four hours to meet with a member of staff who was not at work upon my arrival. As I stood at the entrance, not knowing if I would be allowed in or kept out, it dawned on me that my access was completely dependent on someone else (Reiter 2014). Fortunately, another staff member agreed to facilitate the visit, and I was able to speak with several women, including Black mothers, which further contributed to my understanding of women’s imprisonment as well as MBUs and helped the development of my research questions.

The ethical approval I received from HMPPS gave me permission to apply to six out of the twelve institutions within the women’s prison estate, with the goal of eventually gaining

research access into two. I provisionally selected these six prisons based on factors, such as the number of Black women recorded as being imprisoned within the establishment and the presence of MBU facilities. I presumed recruitment may be more successful within establishments with higher numbers of Black imprisoned women and the presence of a MBU would enable me to meet the requirements set by HMPPS. I wrote a letter to the governor of my first selected prison, one which I had previously visited, at the start of October 2019 and waited a month for a reply. I then sent a follow up letter which was responded to in late November stating I could not conduct the research at the institution due the “low” number of Black mothers within the establishment.

Following the first rejection I wrote to three more prisons, one of which responded the following day via email, as I had included my contact details in the first letter. However, after the initial few email interactions the communication ceased for just under a month despite me sending four follow-up emails. A month later I received a rejection from this prison, due to low staffing, minimal resources and there already being researchers within the establishment. During this time, I had also received no response from the other two prisons and so after reaching the one-month mark, I decided to send some follow up letters by post. Therefore, despite having positively negotiated entry via HMPPS National Research Committee I was struggling to gain access via the gatekeepers on the ground. It was becoming a repetitive cycle of sending a letter, waiting, hearing nothing back and then sending another letter; a process which was extremely disheartening.

At last, On the 19th of December 2019, I was granted access to HMP Scarlet Oak. I was put in touch with a contact who would facilitate my research and after months of email and telephone exchanges it was arranged that my first visit would take place on the 31st of March 2020; dependent upon my passing of their interim risk assessment. This assessment would allow me to visit for three days initially and following this I would need to go through prison vetting for any further visits. During the time I had spent arranging the interviews with Scarlet Oak I had also received a response from HMP Greenhill on the 21st of January 2020, based within open conditions, granting me access to their establishment. Communication with this establishment was much quicker, easier, and more effective - perhaps due to the lower security classification - and on the 25th of February 2020 I visited HMP Greenhill with the aim

of meeting and speaking with Black imprisoned mothers who met the initial inclusion criteria for the research.

4.3.2 (Initial) Inclusion Criteria

The initial inclusion criteria for this research consisted of imprisoned mothers who self-identified as Black or as having a racial identity which they considered to overlap, intersect or be interchangeable with 'Blackness' (see section 2.2). Changes to this target population, to include self-identified Black mothers with previous lived experience of imprisonment, are outlined in section 4.4. Racial self-identification was considered important as I did not want to label people with an identity which they did not hold for themselves as this could lead to the inappropriate exclusion and/or inclusion of certain individuals (Sims and Joseph-Salisbury 2019; Song and Aspinall 2012). This wide-ranging inclusion criterion was considered vital to capture the complexity and nuance of racial identification (Lewis 2020; Thompson 2014).

The importance of self-identification was emphasised during my time at Greenhill. During interview Donna³⁷ discussed that as she was racialised as Mixed-race, she felt like she did not belong to a particular racial group and noted that she tended to just "sit on the edge" (see subsection 6.2.4 for more detail). She placed emphasis on self-identification and stressed the importance of being able to "decide" for herself where she belonged after experiencing racialised rejection:

"They'd let me know I'm not one of them... I'm not in the Black. And I'm like oh okay I thought that was up to me to decide. I didn't know people decided ... that for me"

Donna's statement is poignant as it demonstrates how she had experienced her racial identity as something over which she no longer had control; as though others had the power to define who she was, more so than she could (see also Campbell and Troyer 2007; Campion 2019). Her narrative highlighted the importance of an inclusive criteria, as a more restrictive definition of Blackness would have further perpetuated the idea that mothers like Donna could not be included in discussions surrounding Blackness; an idea which she herself was trying to

³⁷ In section 4.8, I introduce each of the mothers who participated in this research using "pen-portraits" (Baldwin 2021:121).

challenge. Sims and Joseph-Salisbury (2019:56) suggest that some people may “interchangeably” and/or “simultaneously” identify with being both Mixed-race and Black and so Donna’s assertion that she wanted to take part may be a demonstration of this complexity³⁸.

Omi and Winant (1994:19) and Reginald et al (2014:8) place emphasis on the unfixed nature of racial classifications and suggest that their “socio-cultural meanings are constantly being “created, inhabited, contested, transformed and destroyed”. As a Black-mixed-race feminist researcher, being responsive to the ways in which Blackness can be experienced outside of the fixed racial binaries constructed by those in power is another way of positioning Black experience, with all its complexities, at the core of this very research. Whilst it is not appropriate within this research to create a fixed and rigid definition of Blackness it *is* crucial to consider the ways in which colourism may result in more privileged experiences for women identifying with multiracial identities (see Campion 2019; Lewis 2020; Thompson 2014). It is not that cultural proximities to Whiteness should be ignored and glossed over but rather must be discussed and incorporated into analysis to create more nuanced understandings of Black mothering and imprisonment.

The inclusion criteria for this research also utilised an expansive definition of ‘*mothering*’ so that any Black women who had the significant responsibility of caring for a child, at any time prior to their imprisonment, could be included in understandings of Black imprisoned mothering. This expansive definition (not rooted in a biological definition) was considered especially important for this research as, as discussed in section 2.3, Black mothering has historically encapsulated the nurturing of children within one’s own home, wider family and community (see also Collins 1990; Reynolds 2003;2005). However, as these practices are often not recognised as ‘traditional’ types of mothering within Britain such women with mothering responsibilities may be overlooked in research which defines mothering more narrowly. The criteria used was also inclusive of mothers to children over the age of eighteen to avoid

³⁸ It is interesting to consider, if I had been speaking with women racialised as White whether Donna would have felt inclined, or even able, express interest in taking part. Research by Song and Hashem (2010) found that individuals with one Black and one White parent were likely to identify as either ‘mixed-race’ or ‘Black’ highlighting ‘White’ as a racial category inaccessible, or un-relatable, to them, again reinforcing the more expansive construction of Blackness that does not exist within constructions of Whiteness.

defining certain stages of mothering as more important than others (see also Baldwin 2021). This enabled the research to explore the ways in which ages of children may shape experiences of imprisonment; with differing mothering responsibilities, relationships and expectations characterising different stages of a child's life course (see Francis-Connolly 1998; Francis-Connolly 2000; Gross 1985).

4.3.3 Recruitment

As I had planned to conduct research with Black mothers imprisoned within closed conditions at Scarlet Oak and open conditions at Greenhill, it was anticipated that due to the “practical factors unique to each regime” and differing rules and regulations characterising each of the prisons, the recruitment process would vary slightly between sites (Quraishi 2008:455). This flexible approach was underpinned by Quarishi (2008:455) who argues that when conducting prisons research across multiple sites one's “methods of enquiry and [production]” must “remain flexible and open to adaptation”. It was therefore anticipated that whilst purposive sampling techniques were used to define the inclusion criteria of the research, due to different prison regimes and conditions, the techniques and approaches to recruitment would be subject to the discretion of the gatekeepers and the rules within each institution. Upon reflection, this flexibility towards methodological adaptation would become even more essential following the research adjustments made in response to Covid-19 research restrictions (see section 4.4).

On the 25th of February 2020, I conducted my first and only day of data production through four face-to-face interviews with Black mothers imprisoned in Greenhill. Two weeks prior to this visit Charlie, the third sector staff member based in the prison supporting me with my research, displayed my research posters around the site (see appendix five). We felt that this timeframe would give mothers enough time to consider taking part. During this time, Charlie also spoke with mothers who she perceived to meet the inclusion criteria to discuss the research and check their interest in speaking with me. Whilst at Greenhill, I was based within a private office³⁹ where I was introduced to the four mothers (see section 4.8 that introduces

³⁹ As I was based within the office all day, I also conducted the interviews within this space and as Greenhill was characterised by open conditions the mothers were able to approach the office

the mothers) who were interested in speaking with me and answered any questions they had, about myself and the research. Spending the day on-site also enabled me to become more familiar with the environment and I was able to speak informally between interviews with other imprisoned women and staff.

It is necessary to highlight, however, my research in Greenhill was shortened from three days to one as Charlie felt that there were not enough Black mothers in the institution to constitute three days of recruitment and interviewing, although she did note that I could return in a few months. Compared to closed conditions with larger populations and higher numbers of women racialised as Black, Greenhill appeared to be viewed by both staff and imprisoned women as predominately White institutional space and the low numbers of Black women, and even lower number of Black mothers, made recruitment here particularly challenging. The recruitment process was also impacted by my choice of research topic and the racial dynamics at play within Greenhill, which I will discuss in subsection 4.10.3. In relation to recruitment at Scarlet Oak, as the dates for my research visit approached the outbreak of Covid-19 resulted in the National Research committee pausing all research in prisons and I was unable to travel, resulting in the visit being put on hold. These restrictions also meant that I could not return to Greenhill to conduct further interviews as previously planned. In the next section I address the effects that the global pandemic and subsequent implementation of safety measures and restrictions had on reshaping the overall research design, and strategies of recruitment, in further detail.

4.4 Researching in the Community

This section outlines and reflects upon the adjustments made to accommodate the move away from face-to-face prisons research to research in the 'community' with Black mothers with previous experience(s) of imprisonment.

4.4.1 Covid-19 Restrictions and Research Adjustments

Weissman et al (2020:1171) observe "the outbreak in December 2019 of the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19) and the subsequent pandemic...prompted numerous governments

themselves to speak with me when they were ready to do so. As the office was a private space only Charlie had access to the room during interview.

worldwide to temporarily stop or restrict ‘nonessential activities’’. These restrictions resulted in many researchers world-wide having to pause, postpone or adjust their research plans to comply with safety guidelines and social distancing measures (Dodds and Hess 2020; Weissman et al 2020). Research adjustments largely consisted of recommendations to switch to remote or online methods of data production such as conducting telephone or video interviews, virtual focus groups, or virtual ethnographies. However, such adjustments were not available for prison research. On the 23rd of March 2020 I received an email from the National Research Committee stating that any current or planned primary research taking place within Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Services (HMPPS) would have to be paused until further notice (see also HM Prison and Probation Service 2020).

Due to the ongoing uncertainty of regaining access to prisons I decided to redefine my inclusion criteria to continue with data production. On the 13th of July 2020 I received ethical approval from Cardiff University’s Social Science Research Committee (appendix six) to expand my inclusion criteria to include Black mothers with previous lived experience of imprisonment. Similarly, to how the racialised experiences of Black mothers have been rendered largely invisible within existing research concerning mothering and imprisonment, Gurusami (2019) identifies Black mothers are also often overlooked in research relating to the continuation of mothering after imprisonment. Therefore, the inclusion of after-prison narratives not only provided a highly important insight into experiences of imprisonment but also experiences of resettlement, mothering, and life after release (Baldwin 2018) and how these may be shaped by experiences racialisation and racism (Jacobson et al 2010; Lynn 2021; Gurusami 2019; Owens 2010).

4.4.2 Recruitment

Multiple recruitment strategies were utilised to speak with Black mothers in the community with previous lived experience of imprisonment, through virtual interviews. The first strategy involved remotely contacting relevant third sector and community organisations based in England and Wales who may support or employ Black mothers with a history of imprisonment. Between July 2020 and May 2021, I contacted 59 relevant organisations via email and telephone (see appendix seven). Of the 64 organisations contacted, 12 agreed to share my research poster and information sheet with their service users and staff (appendix eight).

Reasons provided for not facilitating the research understandably involved organisations no longer supporting research requests due to the over-researching of certain populations, not being able to effectively support women through the research process during Covid-19 due to social distancing measures, the impact of Covid-19 on women's mental and physical health, a lack of staff and resources; and not knowing of women in their network who met the target criteria (appendix nine). As a result of this recruitment strategy, three mothers contacted me highlighting their initial interest, however, only two of these mothers had experienced imprisonment and consequently produced narratives which informed the research findings.

Recruitment was also attempted via the social media, with Twitter being used as the main⁴⁰ platform. It was felt that using Twitter for recruitment would help to connect with Black mothers who may not currently be engaging with, or working for, community or third sector organisations (Wilson and Usher 2017). This was particularly imperative for this research as women racialised as 'non-White' are identified as being less likely to access support services due to institutional barriers and social stigma (Imkaan 2016; Lovatt et al 2020). Additionally, not all women with experience of imprisonment will need, or continue to need support following their prison sentences and/or will choose to volunteer or work within the third sector. Approaches to recruitment aimed solely at Black mothers actively engaging with support services may have therefore missed the experiences of those who did not want, need, or provide support in the community (Gundur 2019). Using my academic Twitter account, I posted my research poster on three different occasions gaining 106, 72, and 26 retweets in each separate post. Other academic accounts and third sector organisations also posted the poster to their main pages widening its reach. However, despite bringing attention to the research project and widening my professional network, no participants were recruited through Twitter.

The third recruitment strategy involved drawing upon my personal and extended social networks to connect with Black mothers who had previously experienced imprisonment. I

⁴⁰A private and closed Facebook account was also used as a means of requesting for group admins to share my researcher poster in their private Facebook groups made for women to keep in touch with one another post-release, However, this was unsuccessful. Friends and colleagues also shared my research poster on their social media accounts which included: Facebook and Instagram which did not receive any response.

shared my research poster via text and email with my family and friends who then circulated the information within their differing social networks. Interestingly, similar to me, many people knew Black men and fathers who had been to prison but very few people expressed knowing of Black women and mothers. This may reflect Willingham's (2011) argument that Black men in and after prison are often supported and accepted more by their communities than Black women, perhaps affording them with more visibility. In one conversation I had with my partner's niece, she could not believe that an 'African mother' would ever go to prison and expressed how unlikely she felt it would be for me to identify such women for interview. This highlights the stigma which may have made recruitment for this research particularly difficult.

Nevertheless, from the recruitment within my extended social networks, five mothers expressed an interest in taking part in a virtual interview. I then shared more detailed information about the research by providing them with information sheets sent via email and answering any questions they had via email or over the phone. Following these initial interactions three mothers gave consent to taking part in an interview (see section 4.5). It is important to highlight that more women and mothers were known to my extended social networks but either did not indicate an interest in taking part or did not meet the target criteria, such as being imprisoned in another country outside of Britain. All of the mothers who consented to taking part were also asked following their interview if they could share the research poster with their social networks to facilitate a snowball recruitment strategy. However, I did not connect with any mothers through this method.

Despite the wide range of approaches adopted between July 2020 and May 2021, recruitment was very slow. Due to Covid-19, the inability to physically go and meet mothers in differing social spaces meant that recruitment was largely reliant on the remote circulation of information firstly reaching Black mothers in the community and then being informative and welcoming enough to invite participation. This physical detachment was acknowledged by an organisation who commented that they felt mothers would have been more interested and comfortable in taking part if they still had access to the centre as they would have been able to meet me in person and/or be more closely supported by staff members. Similarly, another woman expressed being happy for me to go to her house for an interview but due to social distancing regulations I could not do this, and contact was broken.

In April 2021 I was informed by the National Research Committee that the majority of probation services were at step two of their roadmap to recovery. As per Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service (2020) guidelines external applicants could conduct primary research subject to approval from the National Research Committee at step 2, with precedence given to projects utilising remote methods of data production. It was decided I would apply to the National Research Committee with a request for adjusting my project to include Black mothers currently subject to licence conditions following a prison sentence so as to further expand my target population and widen the scope for recruitment. Following a meeting with the London Probation Research Committee on the 22nd of June and the submission of an application on the 2nd of August to HMPPS National Research Committee I was granted ethical approval to conduct research with Black mothers currently subject to probation in London (see appendix 10).

Despite circulating my research with several probation officers and speaking at a meeting with organisations supporting women subject to probation recruitment was unsuccessful. I consequently decided that I would solely focus on the narratives already produced with four mothers imprisoned in Greenhill and five mothers living in the community (see section 4.8). Whilst I had originally aimed to speak with between fifteen and twenty mothers, narrative epistemology encourages us to see value in the partiality and subjectivity of our research. It is not about aiming to conduct highly generalisable research with large sample sizes, but rather focusing in on highly personal lived experiences; and understanding what they mean in their specific contexts (Butina 2015; Thomas and Magilvy 2011; McAdams 1993). Producing narratives with just nine mothers thus enabled me to better ensure the quality and richness of the data produced (Wells 2011) and arguably heightened my familiarity with each mother's narrative. In the section that follows, I provide a detailed description of the ethical principles guiding this research.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

In this section I highlight the ethical decisions that have shaped how I have structured the research process in relation to informed consent, confidentiality, participant safety and the

right to withdraw. Whilst at Greenhill, I was based within a private office⁴¹ where I was introduced to four mothers (see section 4.8) who were interested in speaking with me and answered any questions they had, about myself and the research. I also provided them with information sheets (see appendix 11) outlining details of the research so that they could make an informed decision prior to taking part as to whether they felt comfortable discussing the sensitive topics involved (Maxfield and Babbie 2016; Renzetti and Lee 1993). This was considered particularly important as topics such as maternal separation and racism, as well as other experiences of marginalisation and harm were likely to be discussed depending on what the mothers had experienced and felt comfortable sharing. It was also made clear that the interviews could be paused or stopped at any time if it became too difficult, or was deemed inappropriate, to proceed and the mothers were also required to sign consent forms (appendix 12) which demonstrated their understanding of, and agreement to, taking part in the interviewing process (Oakley 1981).

It is acknowledged that when conducting prisons research there are fundamental issues with consent, as by conducting research with people experiencing a loss of liberty their sense of choice may be strained or limited by the institutional pressure they face (Given 2008; Matfin 2000). There are also ethical implications surrounding drawing upon someone's loss of freedom as a means of producing data (Given 2008) and the power imbalance that this creates as a result. Importantly though, Bosworth et al (2005) suggest that when conducting prisons research, each person is likely to have their personal reasons for choosing to take part, which may be responsive to the environment in that they are in or their past experiences. For example, Annette (see section 4.8), who was supposed to be at work proclaimed that she'd "*rather be doing this than peeling potatoes*" (Research notes) and she joked that I could take as long as I wanted. Additionally, Sharon shared that she had initially been hesitant to take part as she had already spoken with a previous researcher about being a Black woman in prison. When she realised my research concerned experiences of mothering, she had changed her mind and come to the office as she felt it was important to talk about this particular experience

⁴¹ As I was based within the office all day, I also conducted the interviews within this space and as Greenhill was characterised by open conditions the mothers were able to approach the office themselves to speak with me when they were ready to do so. As the office was a private space only Charlie (the staff member) had access to the room during interview.

(Research notes). Therefore, the mothers seemed to have an awareness of the power they held in deciding whether to take part in the research and felt able to express their varied motivations for choosing, or not choosing (one mother approached by staff member Charlie chose not to meet me), to do so.

Unlike the interviews in Greenhill which took place face-to-face, interviews within the community took place virtually via Zoom or the telephone, in keeping with national social distancing guidelines and the regulations set out by Cardiff University's Social Science Research Ethics Committee. Zoom is verified as an appropriate and safe tool for recording data as it can "securely record and store sessions without recourse to third-party software... [which] is particularly important in research where the protection of highly sensitive data is required" as well as "real-time encryption of meetings" (Archibald et al 2019:2). Mothers were given the choice as to whether they wanted to take part in either a telephone or Zoom interview and whether they wanted to be recorded using video and audio, only audio or handwritten notes. I felt it was important that mothers were given this choice in how they wanted their narratives to be produced, facilitated, and recorded and a range of interview mediums and recording techniques were utilised. This included interviews via Zoom where the camera was turned on during recording, interviews via Zoom where the camera was turned off⁴² during recording and a telephone interview. The mothers were also reminded that recordings would be deleted upon completion of transcription and analysis.

Mothers in the community gave consent by virtually signing the consent forms sent to them via email or giving oral consent at the beginning of the recording (see appendix 12). They were also provided with information sheets (see appendix 8) and able to speak with me and ask me any questions before the interview took place. I also stressed their right to pause or end the interview at any time. To join the Zoom call, the mothers were sent a unique link that was generated separately for each individual meeting. The 'waiting room function' was also

⁴² In all interviews via Zoom I had my camera turned on. I felt it was important for me to be visible to the mothers throughout the interview regardless of their visibility to me. The mothers therefore could see me and my situational location (that being the kitchen in my flat). It was also felt that conducting the interview in a familiar space relating to the 'home' would help to construct a better sense of informality and comfort.

enabled so that no one could enter the meeting unless I accepted them in, further safeguarding our safety and privacy during interview. I also made sure that I was in a private room when conducting the interviews. In relation to the mothers, it was up to them to decide where they felt comfortable situating themselves and who they wanted around however, when asked, I did advise that they may want to find somewhere private and comfortable due to the sensitive nature of the conversation.

In relation to recording and data storage, the interviews conducted at Greenhill were documented using a digital recording device and research notes as permitted by the Governor. Hand-written research notes were used to record information during (and at times before and after) the interviews. Notes included non-verbal gestures made by the mothers, interruptions to the interview, descriptions of the interview space and surroundings as well as important points needed to be followed up. These notes are used within this research as another source for reflection and data generation alongside the interview recordings. In accordance with both HMPPS National Research Committee and Social Science Research Ethics Committee guidelines the recordings stored on an encrypted and password protected memory stick and then deleted upon completion of written transcriptions and analysis. The interview transcripts were then individually password protected and kept on a password protected computer. These were also edited to ensure that all names or other identifiable information was removed further ensuring participant confidentiality and anonymity. Additionally, all interview notes, consent forms and memory sticks were also kept in a locked safe, to which only I had access. In the subsection that follows, I outline some of the specific ethical considerations and epistemological decisions that shaped my approach to interviewing.

4.6 Narrative Interviewing

As highlighted above, in-person and virtual one-to-one narrative interviews were used in this research as the main tools for data production. Two interview guides were developed and utilised to accommodate for the differing experiences between Black imprisoned mothers and Black mothers in the community with previous experiences of imprisonment (appendices 13 and 14). Although many questions were the same across both the guides, mothers in the latter group were also asked questions about their transition from prison back into the community

and life after prison. Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2016) highlight how narrative interviewing techniques rely upon constructing interview questions in a specific way to encourage tellers to share their stories. Therefore, when developing the guides, I was conscious of constructing questions that would facilitate a storied response. I ordered the guides to support the development of a coherent story, consisting of a beginning (personal background and life before imprisonment), middle (mothering and imprisonment) and an end (recommendations for improved support, hopes for the future and, where relevant, life after prison).

For this research, the ordering of the guide was considered particularly important due to its focus upon imprisonment, maternal separation and racism, topics which can be highly sensitive and emotive. The structure of the guide thus also attempted to mitigate against mothers leaving the interview feeling upset or distressed by placing highly sensitive topics in the middle of the interview and positioning subjects regarding hope and positivity towards the end. This is supported by Few et al (2003:213) who suggest that when structuring interviews, the final questions should not “tap into painful recollections” as individuals are more likely to leave the interview with unresolved emotions. The interview structure also supported my own mental wellbeing whilst engaging in sensitive, upsetting and difficult conversations with the mothers.

At the end of each interview (away from the recording) I ensured there was time for an informal debrief where the mothers could reflect on their narratives, ask me questions, and I could ensure that they were comfortable and ready for our conversation to come to an end. I also made myself aware of the systems of support available to women during imprisonment and in the community, so that I could signpost them to the mothers if necessary (Few et al 2003). Having an awareness of relevant support organisations also came in useful when mothers raised issues during interviews which they wanted support with but were not sure where to look for this support and in two interviews I signposted women to relevant organisations that may have been able to help meet their expressed needs.

A broad and open-ended questioning style was adopted to allow room for the highly detailed, personal, and diverse nature of narrative storying (Banks-Wallace 2002; Nadar 2014). A starting question such as: “What was life like for you before going to prison?” allows the teller to choose what aspects of their life they wish to narrate. They can choose where to start their story, who

to include and whether they want to discuss it at all. This approach is supported by Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2016) who highlight the importance of a broad questioning style to ensure storytellers maintain a level of autonomy over their own narrative. This strategy is considered to be in accordance with a qualitative research approach as rich, detailed, and varied narratives are produced when using this method, providing subjective and partial understandings of the research topic (Anderson and Kirkpatrick 2016; Hudson and Ozanne 1998; Straus and Corbin 1990). Although the main questions were broad, several slightly more specific research prompts were also created for if the storyteller needed more direction or guidance. The prompts were solely there to assist the process of storytelling through encouraging a more in-depth reflection of the teller's lived experiences and emotions, leading to the development of more rich and detailed data.

To be responsive to the subjective nature of each story, semi-structured interview techniques were utilised. Semi-structured interviews allow the teller (participant) and the listener (researcher) "freedom to digress" from the rigid interview guide (Berg and Lune 2014:112). The questions asked within each interview therefore inevitably vary depending upon the interaction between teller and listener; regarding the type of story the teller wants to tell and what the listener hears. This approach to narrative interviewing acknowledges the diverse nature of storytelling as well as the subjective nature of our experiences more generally (see Banks-Wallace 2002; Nadar 2014). This is particularly important when listening to mothering narratives relating to imprisonment as contexts of mothering may vary greatly. For example, not all mothers have custody of their children with some being in care, in the process of adoption or having already been adopted; and so asking the wrong question could be potentially upsetting and inappropriate. It is important that certain questions can be added or removed from the interview process to be sensitive to these differences. A semi-structured approach also gives the mothers more power within the research process as they can guide the topic of conversation depending upon what they deem significant in their own storied lives (Kvale and Brinkman 2009; Yost and Chmielewski 2013).

4.7 Background Information

Background information relating to the mothers participating in this research was also used to guide the narrative interviewing process and support analysis (see also Matfin 2000). This included information relating to the mothers' age, nationality, racialised identity, offence type(s)⁴³ (if convicted), sentence length(s) (if convicted) and number of children. The mothers were asked if they were comfortable sharing this information before the interview and any disclosed information was recorded along with their consent forms and interview notes. I made the decision to rely on background information provided by the mothers themselves, rather than reviewing institutional data held by each prison site, to ensure I was only accessing information that the mothers felt comfortable with me knowing (Williams 2003; Watts 2006). This strategy, of relying on personally shared information, meant that when the inclusion criteria expanded due to Covid-19 there was a consistency between the way that background information was sought amongst both women in prison and women in the community.

Using background information provided by women themselves was also considered more in keeping with a narrative ontology and epistemology, which finds value in the subjective ways that people make sense of their lives (see Polkingthorne 2007). Whilst triangulating institutional data with other research data is often used as a means of validating one's research findings (Hancock and Raeside 2009; Olsen 2004) this type of fact checking for 'truth' was considered unnecessary for this research approach. Reflecting upon background information provided by the mothers themselves allowed me to contextualise their narratives based on their own representations and understandings. Ezzy (2002) argues that when conducting narrative analysis, the situational and background factors of each individual narrative should be considered and then compared with others to identify commonalities and differences. Background information was thus used to support an understanding of the data produced during interviews, rather than as data to be analysed. The section which follows, draws upon background information and interview data to provide descriptions and a snapshot summary of the mothers whose narratives are represented in this research.

⁴³ Specific offence types are not discussed in this thesis as it is not considered appropriate to further define the mothers by their past convictions and this also provides an additional layer of anonymity for those who shared their experiences.

4.8 The Mothers

This section provides introductory descriptions of the mothers whose narratives shaped this thesis (see also appendix 15). Both Reynolds (2005) and Baldwin (2021) use short descriptions to represent the mothers who participated in their research. Baldwin (2021:121) describes these descriptions as “pen-portraits” which prevent participants from being “reduced to a series of disembodied quotes without any sense of the mothers as women”. It is important to recognise, that the introductory descriptions in this thesis are authored by me and so provide contextual representations of the mothers’ identities and experiences based on my interpretations. I have taken care to ensure that the descriptions provided do not jeopardize the mothers’ anonymity. A snapshot summary is also outlined providing broader insight into the characteristics of the mothers whose narratives informed this research. The summary does not include statistical or numeric information as it is not considered necessary or appropriate in this research to reduce women to numbers. In keeping with Black feminist narrative epistemology, therefore, individual experiences have importance, whether they are shared or not, and so numbers do not add significance to the meaning derived.

4.8.1 *Introducing the Mothers*

Annette (aged 38)

A Black British woman of Caribbean⁴⁴ heritage, single mother-of-one Annette described herself as “an upstanding member of [her] community” who had worked her whole life. She had been transferred to open conditions “just months” into her four-and-a-half-year sentence; her first. Due to imprisonment, her teenage daughter had been temporarily placed in local authority care and she found their separation extremely difficult. Annette’s mother was also in prison and was facing deportation; however, she was hopeful her mother’s appeal would be upheld.

⁴⁴ To further ensure anonymity, I have decided not to represent the specific cultural backgrounds of each mother, however, I acknowledge that this does present a reduced version of their identities. I have also chosen not to present the exact ages of the children to add an additional layer of anonymity.

Donna (50)

A woman of Black- Caribbean and White-British heritage., mother-of-four. Donna was serving a six-year custodial sentence; her first. She had three adult children and a pre-adolescent son who was now living with his father due to her imprisonment. Before imprisonment she had experienced the breakdown of her marriage, faced issues with her health and disclosed being subject to financial and emotional abuse from her ex-husband. She described these experiences as leading to a psychological “break” resulting in her offence and imprisonment. Donna felt that she had begun to heal from her past and was looking forward to living with her teenage son again after her release.

Malika (32)

A Black British woman of Caribbean and African American heritage. Single mother to four children all under sixteen. This was her first custodial sentence and she had been sentenced to four years imprisonment. Two of her children were now living with their father and two with their grandmother. Malika had chosen not to receive visits from her children during her imprisonment but had waited until she was transferred to open conditions to see them again. Towards the end of her sentence, she had begun a college course in the community which she felt would add to her existing qualifications. Malika planned to return to her previous job after her release.

Sharon (51)

A Black British woman of Caribbean heritage, single mother-of-three, and a grandmother. This was her first prison sentence and she had been sentenced⁴⁵ to eight years. Sharon’s main concern was her teenage son who she felt was most impacted by her imprisonment as it had been “only [her] and him at home”. Whilst imprisoned, her son moved between the care of her adult daughters and sister, and she expressed guilt for her family having to take on this responsibility of care. She was due to be released the following year and was focused on rebuilding a life with her family.

⁴⁵ Note, sentence length is different to time served as many of the women interviewed were required to only serve half of their sentence in custody.

Chante (30)

A Black British woman of Black Caribbean heritage, single mother-of-two. Seven years had passed since Chante's release from prison. She had been remanded for six-months before being found not guilty and released. Her first child stayed with his grandmother during these six months. Before being remanded Chante had been a university student and was living alone with her young son. On reception into prison, she found out she was pregnant with her then partner's child. After release, Chante was able to continue with university, work at her old job and move back into her old home with her, now two, children. She also engages in charity work.

Joy (47)

A Black woman born in the region of West-Africa. At the time of her imprisonment, she was a mother-of-one. It had been around 10 years since she had been released from prison and, after appealing her deportation, had been given the right to remain in Britain. It had been her first and only custodial sentence and she had been sentenced to seven years. Early into her sentence, she found out she was pregnant with her son and after giving birth they were able to stay together on an MBU. After less than a year on the MBU her son then went to live with his aunt in the community until her release. Joy is still impacted by the psychological impacts of her custodial sentence.

Kayla (32)

A Black British woman of Caribbean heritage. Five years had passed since her last custodial sentence. Kayla had been arrested multiple times and had been imprisoned three times, with the latest being due to a breach of licence conditions. Kayla's custodial sentences had ranged between one and two years. She was a step-mum to her ex-girlfriends' children who, at the time of her first sentence, had been younger than 10-years-old. Prior to her second sentence, Kayla and her then-girlfriend had just had a baby. Kayla was now living in her flat, had completed college and was starting her own business. She found studying kept her occupied, or she "literally would've gone back to jail".

Linda (52)

A Black British woman. Single mother-of-one, and grandmother. 16 years had passed since her release from prison. This had been her only custodial sentence and she had received nine years. Upon Linda's reception to prison, her nearly teenage daughter had initially stayed with her grandmother until she was old enough to move out. Upon her release she had struggled to find housing and received "no help at all". As a result, she temporarily moved in with her daughter (who was by then an adult) and grandchild. Linda emphasised the need for more funding and support for women after their prison sentence and was looking for funding to start her own business.

Trish (33)

A Black British woman of African and Caribbean heritage who described herself as coming from one of the "most deprived" areas. Single⁴⁶ mother-of-one. Two years had passed since she had been released from prison where she had been sentenced to nine years. This had been her only custodial sentence and her pre-adolescent daughter had been below age ten at the time of her arrest. After release, Trish and her daughter were living in temporary accommodation. She was working two jobs and was "getting to know" her daughter and mother again. One of these jobs included working for a charity supporting people impacted by imprisonment.

4.8.2 Demographic Summary

Of the mothers who had given birth to children before their imprisonment all had had the sole or a shared responsibility of looking after their children. The majority of mothers also planned to, or had resumed, a primary caring responsibility following release. Most of the children under the age of 18 resided with relatives such as grandmothers, aunts, siblings, or their other parent during their mother's imprisonment with only one child being looked after within local authority care. When discussing the circumstances surrounding their imprisonment some of the mothers described living in areas which had exposed them to crime, experiencing abusive relationships, struggling with their mental health, and being deceived into committing an offence. However not all mothers shared detailed information surrounding their reasons for

⁴⁶ Trish's partner (her child's father) was serving a long-term prison sentence so she self-identified as a single parent seemingly due to the physical separation between them, further demonstrating the fluidity of relationship classifications (see subsection 2.7.1).

being in prison. The crimes the mothers were convicted of included drug-related, violent, financial, and weapon-related offences; with drug related offences being the most common. Sentence lengths ranged between one-and-a-half to nine years, with the majority of mothers having experienced a long-term prison sentence of more than four years. Interestingly, dominant arguments which largely focuses on short-term and non-violent offence types would therefore not necessarily advocate on behalf of all the mothers represented in this research, further emphasising its importance.

4.9 Situating Narrative

The situational context of narrative research is considered to shape the interactive process of storytelling. Narratives are thus not only influenced by their wider social, political, historical, and cultural settings but they are also shaped by the immediate environments in which they are created and shared (Josselson 2012). As highlighted previously, this research initially set out to conduct interviews with Black imprisoned mothers. I felt that conducting interviews within prisons would enable me to get a feel for the environment that was being discussed, helping me to situate and better understand the mothering narratives produced within it (Beyens et al 2015; Campbell 1998; Campbell and McGregor 2002). However, upon reflection, the narratives produced with Black mothers via Zoom and the telephone (situated virtually across the mothers' homes and my home) provided an additional opportunity to gain an insight into the ways in which women's lives were contextualised and experienced after imprisonment.

Bochner (2007:2013) argues that stories or narratives contain "knowledge from the past and not necessarily knowledge about the past". The way in which people tell their stories therefore represent the ways in which they understand and make sense of their lives at the time of telling (Polkinghorne 1995). For imprisoned Black mothers, their narratives were responsive to the immediate prison environment and included recollections of past experiences as well as hopes for the future following release (see subsection 4.9.1). For women in the community, their narratives were reflective of remembered histories, retrospective experiences of imprisonment and release, current lives, and future plans (see subsection 4.9.2). Consequently, it is not that after-prison narratives are any less 'accurate' than prison narratives, with both

women in and out of prison drawing upon perceived pasts, presents and possible futures to conceptualize and narrate their current lives (Polkinghorne 1995). It is important to note here, that these contrasting situational contexts are not thought of as 'better' or 'worse' but simply different, with each giving rise to unique forms of narrative production.

4.9.1 'Imprisoned' Narratives

Storied prison narratives are constrained by the highly controlled and regulated environment within which they are situated (Hall and Rossmanith 2016; Lockwood 2017; McKendy 2006). As Lockwood (2017:125) highlights "we are not free to tell any story but are constrained by the stories that are available at the time of telling". For mothers, it is suggested that their mothering stories are frequently silenced within the context of imprisonment and "good mothering" narratives are frequently made unavailable (Lockwood 2017:124). By situating the construction of mothering' prison narratives within prison itself, the rituals, rules, codes, power dynamics, smells, sounds and meanings of this context becomes inseparable from the narratives produced within its walls (Beyens et al 2015). The narratives produced during the first phase of interviewing at Greenhill were thus not only *about*, but also influenced *by* the prison environment in which they were created. Characterising the particular institutional context of Greenhill - as a women's prison defined by open conditions, that houses women towards the end of their sentences, with a small population size, characterised by a largely White demographic of both staff and imprisoned women and located within a rural setting (Charlie – as recorded in my Research notes) - is therefore vital for situating the mothers' narratives produced within it (Josselson 2012; Lockwood 2017; Quarishi 2008).

Notably, this research identifies how, for Black imprisoned mothers, processes of racialisation and racism manifest within contexts of imprisonment and more specifically Greenhill, and also shape, constrain and at times silence particular narratives (see Chapter Six). Prisons therefore seemingly have particular cultures which shape how racism is experienced, articulated and expressed. Josselson (2012:935) argues "society and culture... enable and constrain certain types of stories" with our sense of meaning being derived from, and entangled with, our immediate environments, personal backgrounds, histories and the expectations placed on our sense of being within certain spaces. Linking back in with Nnaemeka's (2003) argument, therefore, by acknowledging the racialised *processes* of imprisonment that shape and/or

constrain Black mothers' stories we can gain a further insight into the meaning of their narratives as responsive to, and created within, this institutional environment. Importance is thus placed in this thesis on not only understanding and representing the '*words*' that the mothers shared but also the situational contexts and dynamics which influenced which stories were "available" (Lockwood 2017:125) to tell and in the process how they came to be told.

4.9.2 Narratives After Imprisonment

It may be assumed that the situational location of the virtual interviews being estranged from the prison environment may have resulted in freer and more liberated narratives, as accounts were no longer subjected to the immediate influence and constraints of this oppressive institution (see Hall and Rossmanith 2016; McKendy 2006). This freedom is arguably reflected in the longer and more detailed narratives produced with mothers after their imprisonment (see appendix 15). However, although post-prison narratives were not physically situated within the prison environment, some were still seemingly influenced by the institution's oppressive expectations of silence and compliance. One of the mothers interviewed expressed her continued fear of receiving repercussions for speaking out against the institution in which she was previously imprisoned, and she requested to have elements of her narrative omitted from the analysis and final write-up (Research notes). This request was made during the post-interview conversation where we were reflecting on some of the topics we had covered during interview, and she listed particular moments she wanted me to avoid writing about.

The way in which post-prison narratives are told, remembered, censored, silenced, or hidden may thus continue to be shaped by the lasting impacts of imprisonment and other forms of oppressions which often extend, expand, and resurface after release (see Baldwin 2018; Gurusami 2019; Opsal 2015; Willingham 2011). However, it is essential to emphasize that the narratives produced with Black mothers after imprisonment also contained moments of hope, happiness, and liberation. Although imprisonment was often understood as a major aspect of their personal pasts, emphasis was often placed on moving forward and developing strategies for healing as well as social change both individually and collectively. Taking part in this research was thus highlighted by many of the mothers as being an opportunity for telling their stories, raising awareness, challenging the prison system and potentially helping other women and families with similar experiences to themselves, as further discussed in section 7.4.

It is also necessary to reflect upon the ways in which the situational contexts of the interviews conducted virtually also shaped the construction, and my interpretation, of their narratives. In relation to communicating in virtual spaces, Weller (2017:619) argues that when conducting virtual interviews, the “glimpses” we get into the lives of the people on the other side of the screen are inevitably “shaped by the devices used, the reach of the webcam and the positioning of the lens”. As speech can be interpreted visually and audibly, whether a virtual interview utilizes audio-only or video and audio recording also shapes the type of narrative produced (Weller 2017; Deakin and Wakefield 2014). In an interview with Trish, where we both had our cameras on, we could interpret and respond to one another based on our verbal communication but also facial expressions, body language and gestures (see also Sedgwick and Spiers 2009). Trish often used facial expressions to convey the emotions she was trying to describe rather than solely relying on verbal language as seen below:

“We got to talk like normal people. How mums and kids sit when they lounge. That was really really nice ... When I got that I was like [Pulls a shocked face] – ‘cuz I’ve been to so many male prisons and I’ve never seen anything like that”

As Trish knew I was able to see her visually, she was able to utilise this form of non-verbal communication to develop her narrative.

In interviews where women chose to have their cameras turned off it was slightly harder to interpret the meaning and intention behind their words as it was not possible to read their body language and facial expressions. However, other non-verbal communications such as tone of voice, pitch of voice, loudness of voice, silence, laughter led to new ways of understanding (Bird 2005). Arguably, therefore, “glimpses” (Wellner 2017:619) can also be auditory; with sound quality, background noise, audio-interruptions⁴⁷ (such as phone calls, family members etc.) and the option to physically mute oneself, or one another, also shaping narrative construction and interpretation. Despite the challenges of not being able to see the

⁴⁷ In this research ‘interruptions’ are anything that cause a pause, break or change in narrative (such as phone calls from children, children entering the room, internet disconnection etc.). Interruptions, which lead to new topic conversations and reveal different relational dynamics, are within this research seen as inextricability linked with the production of narrative and as data available for analysis in itself (see sections 5.2.2 and 6.4.3).

mothers during interview it was important that they had the option of not being video recorded to ensure their comfort during the overall process (see also Weller 2017). The narratives produced became reflective of their situational desire to be protected from, and uncomfortableness with being, seen. Interestingly, most women who took part in an interview via Zoom turned their camera on during our conversations before and after the recorded interview suggesting the desire for visual anonymity was linked to protection from the recording device rather than me, the researcher. Further considering the role of process within research, in the next section I reflexively consider my own positionality and subjectivity which has shaped this research.

4.10 Thinking Reflexively

Black “feminist narrative research calls for us to be reflexive about our positioning” as researchers (Nadar 2014:26). Value is found in developing an understanding of the ways in which our own personal and cultural interests, values and emotions become entangled with and inseparable from the overall research process (Nadar 2014). The importance placed upon neutrality within positivist approaches to research are therefore rejected within Black feminist narrative thought, with the celebration of partiality and positionality (Collins 1989; Nadar 2014). As a Black-mixed-race woman my own assumptions, as shaped by my personal identity and experiences, are considered deeply embedded within this research and inseparable from every stage of the process. My lived experiences have had a subjective impact upon my choosing to do this research, the research questions I produce, the methods I adopt, my interaction with research sites (both in person and virtually), the questions I ask – and the ones I do not, the way that I listen – and what I fail to hear, what people choose to share with me, the conclusions that I make; and the type of knowledge produced (see also Hertz 1997; Phillips and Earle 2010). The following subsections will reflect upon my positioning within the research and the impacts of this on the narratives produced.

4.10.1 Approachability and Visibility

Hordge-Freeman (2018:8) highlights that the way in which we choose to present ourselves can “shape [our] credibility and approachability in the field” and thus the interactions that we have with potential participants. Within Greenhill as I was based within a private office, Charlie and

I kept the door open whilst I was not interviewing, and I was able to speak with the mothers before and after their interviews – as well as other women within Greenhill – answering questions about the research and carrying on conversations if they wished, creating a sense of familiarity for us all. When I had to switch from face-to-face recruitment strategies to virtual methods, I was worried that my personal identity and visibility would be lost and that women would be unlikely to take part if they could not see who I was before agreeing to speak with me. It was really important to me that the mothers were aware of who I was so that they could actively decide whether I was someone they would feel comfortable sharing their experiences with, which was hard to navigate without meeting in person. I therefore stressed my identity within initial written and/or oral communications. If women wanted to, I would also speak with them on the phone or through email prior to the interview to build some sense of familiarity, get to know one another and answer any questions they had. The time before the interview became about consciously making myself present despite the disconnect of the virtual world (Weller 2017).

Feminist authors Few et al (2003) and criminologists Pinkney et al (2018:4) suggest that when conducting research or working with certain groups clothing can be used as a “materialistic symbol” to encourage respect, build rapport or highlight shared cultural experiences. However, clothing can also be worn as a symbol of authority and is commonly used as a means of physically “representing... unequal power dynamics” between individuals (Pinkney et al 2018:4). In relation to my self-presentation within the prison’s environment, I decided it was important that I dressed as *myself* so that the mothers would be meeting *me* (albeit within the confines of prison dress codes). I wanted to dress similar to how I would when providing family support within a local prison, and therefore, I wore casual clothing (trousers, a jumper, and trainers) with my normal make-up and hair tied into a bun.

During the zoom interviews, the cameras only really pictured the mothers and I from our shoulders up and so clothing may not have shaped interaction as much as they might have done face-to-face. However, I did feel able to have my curly hair out in these interviews and at times this self-presentation shaped conversation (see subsection 4.10.2). As highlighted previously, my background during interview was the kitchen in my flat. Although I did not have any other space to conduct the interviews, I felt the kitchen was a good location as it was

informal and helped to create a more relaxed and homely atmosphere (Weller 2017). Therefore, even when existing within a remote or virtual space consideration must still be given to self-presentation and its potential influence in shaping rapport. The next subsection explores the touchstones and differences between the mothers and I which also influenced upon relationships during the interview process.

4.10.2 Touchstones and Differences

During the interviewing process I felt that my own racial, cultural, and gendered identities and other lived experiences helped develop my relationships with my participants who were from similar backgrounds to myself and strengthened my ability to understand and empathise with some of their experiences. This observation is supported by a wide range of literature which argues sharing certain characteristics with one's participants can help to facilitate a more open relationship due to an unconscious, or conscious sense of familiarity which makes it easier to open up, relate to and empathise with one another (Banks-Wallace 2002; Few et al 2003; Liebling 1999; Maylor 2009; Phillips and Earle 2010; Smith and Wincup 2000; Ocheing 2012). When I first met Sharon at Greenhill, we both realised that we shared the same Caribbean heritage and this "touchstone"⁴⁸ shaped our interaction (Banks-Wallace 2002:411).

During our conversation, Sharon expressed her appreciation for being or annoyance at not being able to access certain products during imprisonment. She named foods that were important to her such as saltfish and mackerel; and emphasised her disdain at not being able to access hair extensions, suitable hair creams or the right colour make-up at one of the prisons in which she was confined. All of these things served as touchstones between us as our "shared heritage" meant that I understood the personal and cultural importance of having access to these particular products (Banks-Wallace 2002:411). It also meant that I was able to 'talk back' to her about these things and we spent some time after the interview discussing preferences for hair and make-up, and their significance in our lives. Similarly, conversations about inappropriate beauty products also came up in Zoom conversations with Kayla and Trish who both spoke about Black skin and hair as something collective that "we" shared as reflected in

⁴⁸ Touchstones are defined as "things that remind people of a shared heritage and/or past", bringing them closer together emotionally as a result (Banks-Wallace 2002:411).

Trish's comment: *"I can see by your curly hair you wouldn't be able to use it! It is just going to rip your hair out"* (see subsection 6.2.2); although it was acknowledged that our hair types varied because of me being Black-mixed-race.

Another touchstone which I felt reflected my cultural closeness to the mothers arose through discussions of racism and racial prejudice. The mothers spoke about their lived experiences of these issues, and I was able to relate to their understandings of how these were experienced (see also Banks-Wallace 2002). They discussed receiving certain looks, being spoken to in certain tones and provided other examples of perceived injustices which all made sense to me as these were things I had too experienced or felt; albeit not as a prisoner. I did not need to ask what the 'look' looked like, or 'tone' sounded like to substantiate it as a form of prejudice because I too had seen it, heard it and felt it before – both in my personal life (through my own experiences of racism) and through my work with imprisoned men and their families (through witnessing racism first-hand or speaking with men and their family members about their experiences of racism). There were of course other touchstones between some of the women and I such as mental health, relationship experiences and educational qualifications which also shaped connection and thus the construction of narrative, as emphasised by Kayla who stated *"You know what I mean ... I'm glad you've got that little understanding there"*.

However, prisons researchers have warned against an over-identification with participants as despite sharing similar cultural and gendered backgrounds with the women interviewed as well as other personal experiences, I had never experienced prison as a prisoner (Liebling 1999; Rowe 2014). Therefore, although I could somewhat empathise with their gendered and racial marginalisation in light of my own, I would never truly be able to 'know' what this felt like within the context of a prison environment. Additionally, unequal power dynamics were also very much in existence due to the oppressive nature of imprisonment as well as my position of privilege as a researcher. Both Serrant-Green (2002) and Ochieng (2010) argue that when conducting 'Black sociological research' we must not so eagerly assume an insider status with our participants as Black women come from a number of differing social and cultural backgrounds which may render others socially familiar or unfamiliar to ourselves.

At the time of the interviews, I was a 24–25-year-old, Black-mixed-race, British born, PhD student, prison family support worker and non-mother - who had never experienced imprisonment speaking with Black mothers who were currently experiencing or had previously experienced imprisonment from differing nationalities, cultural backgrounds, educational backgrounds and classed, sexual orientation and age demographics. Therefore, each interviewer-participant relationship was different with our multiple identities shaping the ways we interacted and responded to one another and the narratives that came to be produced from these interactions. This was not viewed as a hindrance to the research process, as the goal was never to uncover an unbiased truth about Black mothering. Instead, value was placed on acknowledging and understanding the partiality of this research as facilitated by me, a Black mixed-race female academic and the consequences that I had on the production of narrative as explored further within the finding's chapters.

4.10.3 "She Needs to Get Over Her Race"

Processes of racialisation within Greenhill and wider society were also found to shape my experiences of recruitment as a Black-mixed-race woman. This subsection highlights the backlash I experienced to this research and situate it within the context of the 'all lives matter' countermovement (see Atkins 2019). During my day at Greenhill, a woman expressed her disagreement with the research topic and questioned my exclusive focus on Black mothering. She asked whether I cared about "all" mothers. Later that day her friend who had been described to me as a Black mother then told Charlie she did not want to meet with me to discuss the research as it was not inclusive, and she did not want to be seen speaking with me. Charlie reflected that as Greenhill was so focused on equality and inclusion anything like a racially specific initiative was likely to be interpreted as unfair by some of the women.

Yet, it had been established that race did matter at Greenhill; with discussions circulating between staff member Charlie and one of the women in prison - who self-identified as an auntie - around the seemingly low numbers of Black women in open conditions compared to closed conditions, the disproportionate sentencing of Black women and the described total

lack of Black staff (Research notes). Phillips and Earle⁴⁹ (2010:366) observe that when conducting prisons research “race, class and gender always matter” as prison life is highly racialised, gendered and classed and as researchers thinking about or operating within this environment, we too are guided by our own cultural experiences and understandings of it. Therefore, there was something about the environment at Greenhill that was almost silencing open conversations about racialisation and racism. I argue this is reflective of a colour-blind ideology that ensures - by claiming to not see race - that people and institutions protect themselves “against valid critiques of racial prejudice” and distance themselves from needing to discuss race and address racism (Thomas 2020a:1). It is important to emphasise here that for the mothers who I spoke with, the aunt who stopped by the office and for Charlie, these conversations were important although at times difficult to have.

I also faced a similar backlash when recruiting in the community. The administration of a closed Facebook group for women with experience of imprisonment shared my research poster and a response was posted that included the comment “She needs to get over her race” (Research notes). The post also expressed that all mothers in prison faced the same challenges and that again, like before, *all* mothers mattered. This time, the comment was made during a time where Black Lives Matter narratives, that had gained increased attention following the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in America in 2020, were constantly being challenged by All Lives Matter counternarratives (see West et al 2021). All Lives Matter counternarratives base themselves on the misinterpretation that Black Lives Matter actually means “only Black lives matter” (Atkins 2019:1). In relation to my research, my focus on Black mothers was interpreted to mean that I believed *only* Black mothers mattered. An interpretation which was and is inaccurate.

Focusing my research on Black mothers and their experiences does not mean that I do not care about non-Black mothers. In the same way that focusing my research on mothers does not mean that I do not care about fathers. Interestingly, I did not receive any questions relating to

⁴⁹ This argument is derived from Phillips and Earle’s (2010) joint research project based within two male prisons. The research involves Phillips a Black woman and Earle a White man, with experience of imprisonment, reflecting upon the differing ways, subjective to their own social positioning’s, that they navigate, experience and conduct research within the same environment.

my focus on mothers or women more generally implying that this challenge was a racialised phenomenon. However, it must also be acknowledged, that the women who challenged my research were arguably fighting to be listened to and heard. Emphasis must thus be placed on ensuring there are multiple platforms and networks that listen and respond to the diverse experiences of mothers with experiences of imprisonment.

4.11 Black Feminist Narrative Analysis

In alignment with the epistemological positioning of this thesis Black feminist thought and narrative analytical approaches were used in conjunction with one another to influence the development of appropriate techniques for data analysis. Patterson et al (2016:60) argue that Black feminist analysis should be guided by a commitment to:

Making multiple truths visible, incorporating the interests and values of participants as a collective, and creating opportunities for self-definition and self-determination, all while emphasizing the importance of Black women's lived experiences.

These underlying principles are considered fundamental for understanding Black mothers' shared experiences during and after imprisonment from their own perspective whilst also acknowledging the complexity and nuance of each mother's individual narrative, as influenced by their personal history, identity and values.

Narrative analysis also emphasises the subjective nature of narrative, with consideration given to how different situational contexts, background factors and research dynamics shape the production and representation of narrative itself (Ezzy 2002). During narrative analysis, Ezzy (2002) suggests people's stories should be analysed as a whole rather than in parts, as individual elements are only deemed significant when positioned within the context of their wider meaning. Understanding is thus derived from analysing how the narration of differing thoughts, experiences, feelings, beliefs and values expressed within individual parts of a story relate to one another; and are influenced by their broader narrative context (Ezzy 2002). Lynn (2021) also explains how narrative analysis aims to draw connections between individual biographical accounts and the overarching societal discourses and structures in which they are produced. Together, Black feminist thought and narrative analysis thus enable the

development of an analytical method particularly sensitive and responsive to the racial and gendered contexts of narrated lived experiences as well as the relationship between the 'teller' and the research 'listener'.

Several frameworks can be used when conducting narrative analysis, such as structural analyses, functional analyses, thematic analyses and dialogic/performance analyses (Allen 2017). This research was largely guided by thematic and performance frameworks. The former enabled an exploration of the presence and meaning of particular topics within the narratives as well as the differing types of narratives expressed (see Allen 2017). The latter prompted consideration of how specific contexts shape the telling of stories (*such as the location of the interview, the way that the teller responds to the listener, interruptions*), "the identities ... at stake in the telling" of the story" (*such as 'good' mothering identities*) and the way that the story may represent the social and political discourses that exist within a particular society, community or culture (*such as racial and gendered discourses of motherhood and/or imprisonment*) (Allen 2017:1069). The remainder of this section outlines the process of conducting a Black feminist narrative analysis utilising these frameworks.

4.11.1 Transcription

The first stage of analysis involved transcription of the narratives produced during interview. Bird (2005:227) defines transcription as the "act of (re)presenting original oral language in written form". Although, it can also include the process of also recording non-verbal language (Bogdan and Taylor 1975), background contexts and interruptions communicated and experienced during interview. In keeping with a performance framework, I purposefully transcribed the data in a way that I perceived would adequately convey the perceived purpose of, and context behind, the mothers' use of language as well as the environments in which narratives were produced. I added background information relating to each narrative such as prison setting, sentence length, number of children and offence type to the beginning of the transcripts in the form of bullet points; providing context for future reading (Allen 2017; Ezzy 2002). I also used comments in square brackets to signal non-verbal gestures or "dialogue accessories" (Bogdan and Taylor 1975:60) such as body language, accents, tone of voice, pauses, laughter or tears to provide further contextual meaning. During interview, Malika would often use her body language rather than words to physically communicate how she felt:

“It’s just getting used to it...So it’s a bit hard on me. It’s like [rolls eyes] [sinks into chair and sighs]”

Without the recording of these non-verbal communications, I would not have been able to revisit the intended meanings behind the mothers’ narratives (Standing 1998), as reflected by the voices they used when impersonating family members, the hushed whispers when they feared being overheard, their tone to add humor or indicate aggravation, the eyerolls of annoyance, the sighs of exacerbation, the sarcastic scoffs, the cracking of the voice when holding back tears, the long silences, the interruptions, and the hand gestures which acted as substitutes for words. I also decided, based on my approach to transcription, to present direct quotations from the mothers’ narratives in a way that most closely conveyed their speech styles. At times, therefore, I reproduce ‘Non-standard English’ in my writing to ensure that the mothers’ narratives do not become informally censored beneath institutional writing standards when presented in this this thesis. It is also important to note, transcription only ever represents the storyteller’s voice as heard and interpreted by the transcriber (see Green et al 1997; Lapadat and Lindsay 1999) I felt it was important to transcribe the interviews myself. Self-transcription ensured the relationship between storyteller and listener established during interview would be continued through transcription and analysis; and that the elements of narrative that I deemed meaningful or recognised as culturally important were ‘kept in’ the data rather than being subconsciously overlooked or purposefully omitted (see Green et al 1997).

4.11.2 Analysing Narratives: Initial Reading and Familiarisation

Following on from transcription, I began data analysis by reading and re-reading the written transcripts so that I could familiarise myself with each mother’s narrative as a whole (Braun and Clarke 2006), as situated within their specific context and in relation to their own views and beliefs (see also Maguire and Delahunt 2017). The process of reading and re-reading is supported by Perez et al (2016:69) who suggests that when conducting Black feminist analysis theorising should always begin with women’s “lived experiences” as told within their personal narratives or “herstories”. During this reading process, I conducted a preliminary thematic and performance narrative analysis based on the four interview transcripts derived from my

interviews with the mothers at Greenhill, to identify some initial themes before I went on to conduct further interviews (see Blom and Nygren 2010). Note, processes of analysis were thus intertwined with processes of data collection with both informing the other, reflecting the nonlinearity of the research process.

During this preliminary analysis I began to look for overarching themes within and across the mothers' narratives. I did this by loosely⁵⁰ colour coding what I perceived to be key phrases, sentences, paragraphs, stories, incidents, observations, and reflections into differing themes in Microsoft Word using both the 'text highlight' and 'font colour' tools (Braun and Clarke 2006; Hunter 2010; Maguire and Delahunt; Woodcock 2016). I considered it important to analyse the data manually rather than using software as it supported a personal closeness to the data whilst also ensuring that the narratives were not broken up into a series of disembodied quotes separate to the contexts in which they were produced (see also Richards and Richards 1994). Through manually analysing the transcripts, I was thus able to repeatedly engage with the narratives produced in their entirety. It is also necessary to note that an open coding technique was used to develop themes within the data, which allowed for codes to be created and revised throughout the coding process (Maguire and Delahunt 2017). I found this was especially important during this early stage of the analysis process as codes were constantly being modified, edited and/or removed.

Following this, I created mind-maps relating to the themes emerging from these loosely categorised codes – with emphasis placed on understanding the main 'stories' that were being told and how these linked to wider social contexts as well as existing academic understandings (see appendix 16). I found this process of mind-mapping particularly useful for exploring my ideas, considering different ways of looking at the data and grouping narratives together. I would then go back into Microsoft Word and connect key points with some reflection on the context of the interview, the backgrounds/personality of each mother and relevant academic literature. This fluid and non-linear approach to analysis which involved moving between

⁵⁰ I use the term 'loosely' to emphasise that a rigid, systematic or statistical process of coding was not used within this research. Rather, colour coding was a process I used to help signify to myself some of the key themes that were emerging from the data and how they connected.

reading for themes, coding, mind-mapping and writing thus ensured that narratives did not lose their situational and social contexts through more passive, or distant, processes of coding.

4.11.3 Analysing Narratives: Reading and Re-reading

According to Braun and Clarke (2006:82) the themes and subthemes derived from data should “capture something important” in relation to ones established research questions (see also Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Once I had completed the transcription of all nine interviews, I began to read, theme, loosely code and re-read the data considering the research questions I had developed for this thesis. Again, emphasis was placed on reading and re-reading the transcripts so that I could constantly be reminded of each mother’s narrative as a whole and the context in which it had been produced which was necessary for performance narrative analysis. As a result of this more pointed approach, the themes and subthemes developed previously were edited, merged, expanded upon and/or removed; to ensure their relevancy to the research. An example of the codes developed within this process is illustrated below:

Before Imprisonment	Motherhood and Imprisonment	Imprisonment	Life After prison
Life before prison	Separation	Adjusting	Hopes/expectations for the future
Circumstances surrounding arrest	Emotions	Labelling	Housing
Sentencing	Closeness/distance	Racism	Deportation
Preparation for imprisonment	Routine/Normality	Institutional spaces	Work/volunteering
Relationships	Protecting childhood	Coping mechanisms	Education
	Discrimination	Support networks	Mothering/Reunification
	Children’s responses	Institutional ‘Progression’	Daughterhood
	Caregivers	Work/Education	
	Pregnancy	Relationships	

Example of developed codes

Whilst I had developed codes in Microsoft Word to help establish themes within the data produced, I again returned to the process of mind-mapping where I was able to explore ideas and the connections between themes more freely and fluidly (see appendix 17). I felt that mind-mapping better helped me to visualise the connections between the mothers' narratives and the ways in which broad overarching themes could then be refined into subthemes. The development of subthemes allowed for broader thematic findings to be broken down into distinct topic areas enabling a more detailed and in-depth analysis (Hunter 2010; Barling et al 2012); whilst still acknowledging how these smaller topics were related to one another under their wider heading. For example, the broad theme "Life after prison" was developed from the data and the subthemes of "Housing", "Reunification", "Routine/Normality" "The future" and "Work" which all individually, and when grouped, provided an insight into what *rebuilding life after imprisonment* meant to the mothers interviewed.

Whilst identifying shared narratives helped to provide an insight into collective experiences surrounding Blackness, mothering and imprisonment, Amoah (1997:99) writes "one must be careful not to assume all Black women have the same experience". It was therefore vital that there was a space within the process of analysis to focus on differences and the potential reasons behind them. In doing so it could be recognised that whilst the mothers interviewed shared common experiences due to their gendered, racial, and mothering identities, nuances within these identities and also their other intersecting identities, influenced the production narrative in differing ways (Adegoke 2020; Crenshaw 1991; Patterson et al 2016; Perez 2006; Serrant-Green 2002). As such, I represent *individual* narratives in the finding's chapters alongside *shared* narratives so as not to erase the multifaceted nature of personal experience. In keeping with Black feminist approaches to research, which critique the reductive nature of positive methodologies (see Collins 1989), in this thesis I do not determine significance based on quantity, that is the number of mothers who have shared an experience, but rather the perceived importance to the overall narrative of Black mothering, imprisonment and life after release.

The final stage of analysis involved placing the identified themes and sub-themes into an order that made sense for the re-telling and interpretation of experiences surrounding imprisonment

for the Black mothers interviewed, with emphasis still placed on both individual and shared narratives and the contexts in which these were situated. Somewhat influenced by Carr's (1986) three-part structure, I made the decision to order the final narrative of this thesis in a way that represented a coherent 'story' of Black mothers' experiences in and after imprisonment, as presented in the following three findings chapters. I begin by focusing specifically on narratives of mothering during imprisonment in Chapter Five. In Chapter Six, I begin to focus more closely on elements of narrative that detail experiences of racialisation and racism in relation to navigating through the prison system towards release. I then highlight the mothers' narratives of life and mothering post-imprisonment in Chapter Seven. Within the latter two findings chapters, I have also purposefully included experiences that were constructed by the mothers as existing alongside, or separate from, their mothering roles in acknowledgement that the mothers did not solely define themselves in relation to motherhood, but that other intersecting identities, concerns and values also shaped their experiences as Black women.

4.12 Summary

In this chapter I have provided an insight into the methodological considerations and processes involved in the development of this research. The adoption of a Black feminist approach to understanding narrative ontology and epistemology has guided every stage of the research process. Throughout the chapter, I placed emphasis on the ways in which these combined theoretical positions underpinned my methodological choices relating to the presentation of self within the field, inclusion criteria, recruitment methods, the process of data production and data analysis. Chapter Five, which is the first of my three findings chapters, begins the literary story constructed in this thesis to represent Black mothers' narratives surrounding life during and after imprisonment.

Chapter Five

Imprisoned Mothering

"I was the super glue to the family, yeah. I held everything together- everyone in. And they haven't got the hub to go to anymore cuz mums' homes not there." Donna

5.1 Introduction

'Imprisoned Mothering' is the first of my three findings chapters, all of which inform an understanding of Black mothers' experiences of imprisonment within the criminal justice system of England and Wales. Underpinned by a Black feminist narrative approach, these chapters utilise thematic and performance methods of narrative analysis to represent and explore personal and shared, narrated experiences of imprisonment as told by Annette, Chante, Donna, Joy, Kayla, Linda, Malika, Sharon and Trish. In keeping with this approach, emphasis is placed on centring the mothers' feelings and experiences (hooks 1989; Collins 1990; Willingham 2011), contextualising the construction of their narratives (Collins 1990; Kouyate 1989; McAdams 1993) and reflecting on my own presence within, and interpretations of, the narratives produced (Few et al 2003; Nadar 2014).

This specific chapter illustrates how the mothers conceptualised and shared their experiences of mothering whilst imprisoned. In the first section I explore how imprisonment redefines and constrains experiences of mothering and the impact of this on mothering identities and emotions. Attention is then given to the ways that the mothers made sense of and strategised their children's caregiving arrangements whilst they were imprisoned, in support of an expanded definition of caregiving within imprisonment literature (see also Booth 2020). In the next section I explore how the mothers navigated mothering *through* the prison walls, with consideration given to these experiences within the liminal space of open prison conditions. Following this, I detail Joy's personal narrative of imprisoned mothering *within* prison walls. In the final section I acknowledge the experiences of mothers who also experienced the imprisoning of their shared parental relationships.

Throughout this thesis, I expand on Collins' (1994) concept of '*motherwork*' (see section 2.9) to include the *work* done by Black mothers and their families in response to the structurally

oppressive context of imprisonment, a context that disproportionately impacts Black women, their families and communities. In this specific chapter, I introduce three categories of motherwork that emerged from the mothers' narratives relating to their experience of sentencing and imprisonment, which I term 'Preparatory Motherwork', 'Connective Motherwork' and 'Protective Motherwork'. Together these categories support the development of a typology of imprisoned motherwork that I build upon throughout the findings chapters of this thesis (see also chapters 6 and 7). Using this repurposed definition of motherwork as an analytical framework, emphasis in this chapter is thus placed on highlighting the "struggles for maternal empowerment" and identity that occur within the prison context as well as the purposive strategies utilised by Black mothers for *doing* mothering whilst imprisoned (Collins 1994:378).

This chapter also acknowledges the processes of 'responsibilisation' (see O'Malley 2009) that appear to underpin experiences of Black mothering during imprisonment. Such processes are evidenced in this chapter through the expectations of strength, resilience and endurance placed upon, and internalised by, the mothers - as well as the lack of institutional investment in their welfare. In this chapter, consideration is also given to how the mothers understood and responded to these racialised expectations of 'coping' and the impact such stereotypes had on their access to adequate care and support. It is also important to recognise, however, that many of the mothers' narratives discussed in this chapter are not always *explicitly* constructed in racialised terms. Afterall, despite being from many differing racialised backgrounds imprisoned mothers are likely to have similar experiences as they are all *mothers*. In keeping with Black feminist epistemology, across the chapter rather than setting out to prove *difference* through contrasts and comparisons, emphasis is placed on centring Black mothers' experiences, as experiences in their own right. This is something that has not yet been done in British scholarship relating to imprisonment and mothering.

5.2 Redefined Mothering

“You don’t have control over your kids, you don’t have control over your life whilst you’re in prison... how can you expect to be a parent when you have no control?” Malika

Throughout the mother’s narratives, mothering identities were positioned as being redefined, challenged and constricted by imprisonment (see also Easterling et al 2018; Lockwood 2018; Baldwin 2018; 2019; 2020). Apart from Joy, who had her first child whilst imprisoned, all the mothers had been either primary or joint caregivers of their children before their imprisonment. Considering this, in what follows, I highlight the inaccessibility of the mothers’ previous mothering identities and practices, their narrated experiences of having to “step back” from (Trish) and lose “control” over (Malika) the day-to-day care of their children and the emotional consequences of maternal separation. Together, the narratives discussed in this section inform an understanding of what it means to *become* an imprisoned mother and what it means to *do* mothering whilst imprisoned.

5.2.1 “You Can’t Be a Mother Really”

Woven throughout the mothers’ narratives were insights into their perceptions of ‘mothering activities’ (Arendell 2000), such as but not limited to, providing comfort and support such as “cuddle up and watch a film” (Annette), managing children’s day-to-day care such as “tuition and regular upkeep” (Malika), providing discipline and structure and physically being with children. However, the inaccessibility of many of these activities during the constraints of imprisonment impacted the mothers’ understanding of their identities (see also Easterling et al 2018 and Cunningham Stringer 2020). Reflecting on her current experience of imprisonment, Malika noted:

“You can’t be a mother really in prison because you can’t manage anything. You can’t be proactive. You can’t actively be there for your kids and you can’t do normality. Like you can’t do normal things... For me, a parent is being there physically, psychologically and obviously, you’re there to provide and be there for your kids. I can’t be with my kids all the time so it’s just pointless really. That’s not being a parent to me. I’m not a part-timer ... But yeah, I do do it, but you can’t - no, you can’t do it! ... As far as normality I can’t do what I would like to do until I leave here because I am limited with what I can do here.”

Malika reveals how her existing mothering identity is challenged by the constrictive nature of the prison environment which rendered many of her day-to-day mothering activities inaccessible. The meanings and expectations attached to mothering stood in contention to the reality of the type of mother she was able to “be” whilst imprisoned. This struggle is evident through the conflict within her narrative where she first stated that she did “do it” (referring to the contact she had with her children) but then corrected herself with the acknowledgment that she “can’t do it” (referring to the mothering activities she valued most but were inaccessible).

Annette’s narrative also illustrated this sense of struggle:

“While I’m still a mother to a child I’m not mothering a child. So, I’m not there for her to support her. Yes, I can call her on the phone, but she can’t call me when she needs me. So, I can only be there so much.”

Annette felt somewhat detached from her mothering role due to the constrictions of her current imprisonment which prevented her from being able to effectively do “mothering”. Her reflection also describes how a non-reciprocal relationship between mother and child is created by the context of imprisonment. Prison phones are designed so that imprisoned people can phone *out* but people in the community cannot phone *in*. This outbound design of the prison phone seemed to exacerbate Annette’s sense of identity loss as she was no longer positioned as the person her daughter could immediately contact for nurture and support. Mother-child-relationship dynamics are therefore redefined by restrictions within the prison environment, which limit *reactive opportunities* for mothering by preventing mothers from being ‘on call’ and available to respond to their children’s immediate needs.

When speaking with Trish and Joy, who were no longer imprisoned, our conversations were ‘interrupted’ and at times paused due to their children phoning them or entering the room and looking for mum (Research notes). These ‘interruptions⁵¹’ provided an insight into the *reactive* mothering activities available to mothers outside of the contexts of imprisonment, a

⁵¹ The word ‘interruption’ is used here as a means of describing the process by which something influences a break, diversion or change in narrative during a conversation whilst providing a “fresh insight” (see Mannay and Morgan 2015:176).

direct contrast to Annette's narrative produced within the confines of Greenhill⁵². Referring back to Boss's (1999) theory of ambiguous loss, (see section 3.9), it can thus be argued that mothers who maintain contact with their children during imprisonment face a paradoxical experience in that they can both be present (through letters, phone calls or visits etc.,) and simultaneously restricted from their children's daily lives (through separation from the community, restricted phone calls) (see also Lockwood 2018).

The notion of Black mothering as something central to family life (Collins 1987; Reynolds 1997), a space where children should be able to turn to - and return to - for care, nurture and support was also present in Donna's and Sharon's narratives produced within Greenhill. As well as their younger sons, Both Sharon and Donna also had adult children and prior to their imprisonment positioned themselves and their homes as being the central "hub" (Donna) for their families who, due to age, were spread across different households. Thinking back to her experiences of mothering before imprisonment, Sharon reminisced:

"Normally my girls would come to mines on Sunday. I'd cook the big dinner and all this. They'd be phoning me every minute: 'Mum how do you cook this again?' ... 'Oh, mum how do you get this out of the top?' - So, I've missed a lot."

Through storying her past using common vignettes of family life, such as family mealtimes (Finch 2007; Rees 2019), Sharon was able to convey the positive mothering identity that she attributed to herself before her imprisonment, offering a sense of power over the representation of her mothering narrative. Past recollections, therefore, provided a space for imprisoned mothers to reaffirm positive and comforting mothering identities (Lockwood 2017) and reclaim a sense of centrality in their children's lives despite their imprisonment. At times, such recollections were constructed as painful as they acted as a reminder of the types of mothering activities that had been "missed" and rendered inaccessible by imprisonment, however, they were also seen to be closely connected to hopes for the future:

"I can't wait to get out and just do them all a Sunday dinner and do them a chicken. Do you get what I mean? I'm looking forward to doing all that again." Donna

⁵² 'Greenhill' is a pseudonym for the prison where I met with Annette, Donna, Sharon and Malika.

Considering Moriss' (2018) conceptualisation of hauntology, in relation to mothers separated from their children, Sharon and Donna's narratives demonstrate how motherhood was often constructed within the *past* and imagined *future* due to the restrictiveness of the *present*.

Like the other mothers, Donna placed great emphasis on the physical separation from her children and how this confused and challenged her previous experiences of motherhood. Prior to her imprisonment, Donna saw herself as a "good parent" whose family life "was well established and fully functioning" and imprisonment was described as disrupting her mothering role:

"I personally couldn't say anything positive has come out of [prison] in regard to my relationship with my son. I think there's a lot of positive things in regard to me and my personal development. In regard to my son um, I really can't see [long pause] I can't see the real gains... I believe that I was a good parent anyway, right. And it's not like I didn't read to him and now I'm gonna read with him... It's like I do all of them things and we've got a really good relationship. If anything, it's I've had to find out that I'm actually somebody out of being a mum"

Throughout her narrative Donna expressed how being imprisoned in open conditions had provided her with space to find herself and acknowledge her personal value, following on from her experiences of domestic violence in the community and what she termed as a psychological "break":

"... the best bit is I've learnt to manage myself, my emotions and be able to reflect. I've got a pause button now... And that feels so nice because my heart isn't racing all the time. I feel a lot more composed. It's almost like I'm [pause]. I was saying to somebody the other day, I feel like I'm - I've become the person that actually I've always wanted to be. I feel like I fit, I'm starting to fit now."

Importantly, such reflections were often caveated with an acknowledgment of the harm that imprisonment had caused to her children, her mothering relationships and her identity as a mother, as explored in subsection 5.2.3, and within her narrative she also reflected on the harmful psychological impact of closed conditions on her mental health and sense of autonomy as an individual (see also Crewe 2011). It is necessary to recognise, therefore, that whilst prison may have provided some space for Donna to nurture her "*personal development*" outside of

being a mother, she still experienced harm within this environment *as a mother* (see subsection 5.2.3), adding to her past experiences of trauma.

Donna's overarching narrative reflects a tension between her mothering self (who she had "established" before her imprisonment but was now suffering) and her new self (who was emerging in response to her imprisonment). To address this tension, emphasis must be placed on moving away from the use of imprisonment, a reactionary, punitive and isolating response to harm, towards the creation of community spaces that maintain mothering underpinned by support, safety and healing, which not only address harm and trauma, but actively work to prevent it (see also Clarke and Chadwick 2017). This is supported by Davis et al (2022:66) who emphasise how associating prisons with care and treatment only acts to *widen* the prisons estate. Instead, they argue, by transforming how care and justice are imagined, understood and delivered access to support need no longer be tied to punishment and a contradictory experience of harm.

Importantly, not all of the mothers solely defined identity loss in relation to physical separation. For Kayla, who had been in a relationship with her son's mother at the time of her imprisonment, homophobia and heterosexism posed challenges for the retention of her mothering identity. Kayla felt that the prison system largely invalidated her mothering identity as it had not understood or accommodated for the dynamics of the parental relationship she had shared with her partner. Kayla recalled not being accepted onto family days within a particular prison until a senior member of staff who was "*a lesbian as well...[and] was more understanding*" supported her with securing the visit. She also felt she had been pressured to explain, justify and defend her identity as a lesbian mother:

"I shouldn't have to explain all of that [How they had their baby]. We're in a relationship, we've had a baby together and that's that... And that makes you feel a type a way. Like are you saying my babies not my baby?"

Kayla's experience affirms DiLapi's (1989:102) explanation of the "motherhood hierarchy" which is "a conceptual framework that reflects the barriers to lesbian motherhood". Heterosexual mothers who reflect nuclear family dynamics are constructed as more suitable mothers, are positioned at the top of the motherhood hierarchy and have the most access to

resources whereas lesbian mothers are positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy and often receive limited support (DiLapi 1989). However, it is important to acknowledge how motherhood hierarchies are also likely to be shaped by racialised and classed processes of marginalisation, with Kayla's mothering experience being situated at the intersections of these multiple jeopardies (see Lorde 1984; Bowleg et al 2003). Not being seen as a mother by some staff in the prison system, because of these constructions and expectations of motherhood, restricted Kayla's access to her desired mothering identity and the opportunities available to her for mothering. Imprisoned mothering narratives therefore illustrate how the nature of imprisonment threatens, redefines and challenges existing mothering identities (Easterling et al 2018; Lockwood 2018), as explored further in the following subsection.

5.2.2 Navigating New Dynamics

"I'm a very hands-on mum. I like to be as involved as possible. So, for me having to step back and hand those reigns over to like family that was really - it wasn't easy for me to do" Trish

For many of the mothers, being forced to "step back" (Malika; Trish) and experience others taking over the day-to-day care of their children whilst they were imprisoned placed additional strain on their mothering identities (Annette; Chante; Linda; Malika; Sharon; Trish). Not only were they prevented from mothering in the way "they used to do things" (Malika), as explored in the previous subsection, but they also had to come to terms with what it meant for someone else to carry out this primary role in their temporary absence (see also Baldwin 2015; Aiello and McQueeney 2021). Many mothers demonstrated an understanding that their children's new caregivers were unlikely to "do all the stuff [they] do" (Chante) or in the same way they had previously done it. For example, both Sharon and Annette, who were imprisoned in Greenhill at the time of our conversation, discussed the different approaches to discipline that their children's new primary caregivers displayed in contrast to themselves. Such narratives provided an insight into how they assigned meaning to discipline in relation to their own mothering identities.

Annette, whose daughter was in temporary foster care, described the foster carer as "very good", "very firm" and "quite caring" but constructed herself as "a lot more [pause] softer with her". Annette was able to retain her own mothering identity by emphasising the comfort and nurture she provided to her daughter that the new *stricter* caregiver did not. This did not seem

to be with the intent of criticising her daughter's foster carer, with whom she had a very positive relationship, but rather appeared to be a means of clearly distinguishing herself from the other "lady" who was currently also in her daughter's life. Contrasting herself to the foster carer was therefore a way of emphasising the validity of her own "softer" mothering practices and the position she still held in her daughter's life (see also Enos 2001). Describing her relationship with son whilst imprisoned, Sharon detailed:

"You're not there to really put down certain rules and tell them behave dem self like my son. So, I'm finding that hard. Now I'm going out, even though I don't want to stress him cuz he's just missed mummy - missed mummy. I don't want him to think mummy's come back out and all she's doing is telling me off. So, I kinda just do it little, little... [My sister] she's got her own kids and where she would tell off her kids, she's not really doing that with my son and she knows a lot that he misses me. She can see it's affected him a lot. So, she kinda softly softly with him."

Sharon felt her son was not receiving the discipline he would have had she not been imprisoned and was concerned about his "rebellious" behaviour. However, she understood the reason for this was likely due to her sister being understanding of her son's complex emotional needs resulting from her imprisonment. Consequently, Sharon felt she had to redefine her own approach to discipline as she did not want to cause her son any further upset whilst she was imprisoned. The guilt Sharon held in relation to her imprisonment redefined the types of disciplinary practices she felt were available to her when considering the more fragile relationship she now shared with her son. Therefore, imprisoned mothering narratives not only reflect how physical restrictions redefine and constrict approaches to mothering but also how mothering must become responsive to a new mother-child dynamic created by the experience of imprisonment itself.

Recalling her previous experience of imprisonment, Linda also highlighted how she and her teenage daughter had struggled to adjust to a shift in parental control:

"Well obviously you're still a mother, you have a child. But what it is - my daughter used to still ask me things like 'Can I go out mum?' 'Can I go here?' And I used to say to her 'I can't do that cuz I'm not - [pause] You are with Nan'. 'You have to ask Nan'. 'Nan has to give the permission and I cannot be doing things like that'."

Whilst imprisoned, Linda did not feel it would be appropriate to have a say in what her daughter was allowed to do and where she could go and this change in responsibility was felt to be “hard” for both her and her daughter. Linda’s inability to mother as she had done so before left her feeling helpless, as in our discussion she later reflected “*I’d think oh god, what am I going to do?*”. The pain associated with a loss of maternal control is not only felt by mothers whose identities are challenged, but also by their children who find it difficult to understand and accept the change to their everyday routines, rules and expectations of homelife (Minson 2019). Imprisoned mothering narratives, therefore, reflect the restricted and re-defined experiences and identities of both mothers as well as their children.

A diminished sense of control was not only present in the mothers’ narratives relating to the redefining and constriction of mothering practices, but this feeling was also explored in regard to child access (Annette; Chante; Donna; Trish). Donna, whose ex-partner became the primary caregiver of their son whilst she was imprisoned constructed herself as “*really lucky that he’s not dug his heels in and kept me away from my little boy*”. The choice of the word “lucky” emphasises Donna’s understanding that her presence in her son’s life was now largely reliant upon the permission of someone else, a concern exacerbated for mothers who may not have positive relationships with their children’s fathers or other caregivers (see Flynn 2012; Baldwin 2021).

Donna positioned discussions concerning access to her son alongside those regarding her experience of domestic violence and coercive control from his father. The ‘luckiness’ she felt in relation to being able to remain in her son’s life seemed to be shaped by her understanding that her ex-partner could have continued to harm or control her through restricting access to her son, but he had not, and she was grateful for that. Throughout the mother’s imprisoned narratives, therefore, common practices associated with mothering, such as control over daily-routines, approaches to discipline as well as the implementation of rules were thus largely constructed as inaccessible, which had consequences for both mothering identities, mother-child relationships and feelings of relative powerlessness. The next subsection considers the emotional trauma felt from this separation.

5.2.3 “Heartbreak” and “Grief”

“It broke me to be separated from my new-born like the bond we had I didn’t wanna lose it like that’s all that kept playing on my mind. Like, every night I was in there it was just the bond between me and my baby” Kayla⁵³

Many of the mothers I spoke with described their experiences of being forcibly separated from their children with highly emotive language illustrating the pain such separation had caused them. I have chosen to share the following excerpt between myself and Donna as it conveys the “grieving process” (Annette) many of the mothers described experiencing:

Donna: I used to be consumed. I was heartbroken about being separated. That’s the only way I can say it. I used to wake up with – it’s like the only way I can say to you - it’s like having a breakup with someone you really, really love. And you miss them and everything about – you know – reminds you of them, adverts, it’s horrible. It’s awful.

Monica: Did you have photos of them?

Donna: Yeah, then they would go up and then I’d take em down. I’d go through that. Like I’d really wanna - and then other days it would be so painful just to see his face.

Monica: So, photographs can be really helpful or they can be –

Donna: Yeah, same with music as well. Like a really huge trigger. Yeah, because he’d have his favourite like little Justin Bieber songs and stuff would come on and adverts - and I didn’t like watching kids films I’d flick em over.

Monica: It was a reminder?

Donna: Too painful yeah. So, you just find ways of actually just pushing that aside and concentrating on your environment rather than your external yeah. Because that’s all you’ve got control over. You’ve got no control over the external and the quicker you get your head round that the better you’ll - you’ll function.

Although Donna was in Greenhill during our conversation, she largely positioned her feelings of extreme emotional distress towards the beginning of her imprisonment in closed conditions. Donna’s narrative reveals the tumultuous and inconsistent relationship she had developed with her mothering identity as memories of motherhood became something that at times

⁵³ Kayla had been presented with the option of entering an MBU with her new-born however as her partner had given birth to their baby and Kayla did “not want her baby in jail”.

provided her comfort (such as through looking at photographs) but also acted as a “*painful*” reminder of what she had lost (such as hearing her son’s favourite song) (see also Baldwin 2018). The songs and films she would have previously watched or listened to with her son, now existed apart from him - as did she, again reflecting a notion of hauntology in which the past becomes entangled with the present (Moriss 2018). Donna therefore found that by focusing on her immediate environment of the prison, she was better able her to begin to accept and function in her new role as an imprisoned mother.

Annette, who was also imprisoned at Greenhill, reflected on her experience in a similar way. Annette had not been able to see her daughter in the early stages of her imprisonment due to the prolonged process of having to navigate contact through social workers who she described as “*not replying to emails*”, being “*very busy*” and having “*heavy caseloads*”. The combination of experiencing separation from her daughter through imprisonment alongside having to navigate these new parental power-dynamics associated with social services, therefore, resulted in intense feelings of anxiety and distress. Like Donna, these heightened feelings were understood as being part of a “*process*” (Annette) that became slightly more manageable as she re-established contact with her daughter and developed strategies for survival whilst imprisoned. However, it is important to acknowledge that for both mothers, feelings of distress were seemingly suppressed, regulated and controlled to cope with the reality of imprisonment, rather than eliminated.

For Trish, who was no longer imprisoned, her experience of maternal separation continued to evoke feelings of emotional trauma:

“You don’t have a like daughter or baby yet - but honestly it is like your child is connected to you by an invisible umbilical cord. And when I was in prison, and I didn’t see her for so long it literally felt like that cord was being pulled and that’s the only way that I can explain it. The pain in my stomach and when I’d explain this to the officers they’d be like ‘Oh yeah yeah’ brush it off... The feeling that I’m telling you about [Voice trembles] it affects your mental health [Wipes tears] because literally for me it was always when I’d feel that I’d be like: ‘That’s because you left your baby’.”

As she knew I was not a mother, Trish described in detail the connection that mothers shared with their babies, perhaps to convey the agonising physical and emotional pain that forced

maternal separation had caused. Trish's metaphor of an *"invisible umbilical cord"* existing between herself and her daughter which she described as being *"pulled"* by imprisonment indicated a state of enforced duress, which had painfully stretched or tugged at the connection between mother and child. Trish's trauma from separation was also exacerbated by her perception that she had been imprisoned for a *"risk"* she had taken. She viewed herself as someone who had *"left [her] baby"* and consequently experienced feelings of guilt and shame which compounded her experience of grief (see also Baldwin 2019). Like many of the mothers, Trish experienced a decline in her mental health following separation from her daughter, with Annette also recalling having to speak *"to healthcare for support"*. However, Trish recalled staff *"brush[ing]"* off this emotional *"pain"*, arguably mirroring wider social discourses of 'responsibilisation' that construct Black women as strong and resilient whilst denying their vulnerability and access to appropriate support (Aniefuna et al 2020; Adegoke and Uviebinene 2018).

Imprisoned mothering narratives thus provide an understanding of the trauma caused by the violent and punitive nature of imprisonment (Baldwin 2018), emphasising how prison itself can be seen as part of a wider continuum of harm in the lives of often already marginalised women and their families. However, when also drawing upon performance methods of narrative analysis (Allen 2017), narratives of imprisoned mothering which centre grief and loss, also act to reaffirm mothering identities that are largely constricted by imprisonment and the stigma attached to it. In relation to the mothers' narratives, stressing the difficulty of maternal separation formulated part of what it meant to be or to have previously been an imprisoned mother, with mothering being constructed as something that remained central to their imprisoned life. Narrating experience thus becomes a means of reaffirming a sense of self (see Bennet and Vidal-Hall 2000) as well as challenging dominant discourses which act to silence marginalised mothers (Morris 2018).

5.3 Caregiving Decisions

In the previous section I explored imprisoned mothering identities largely concerning experiences of separation. In this next section I focus more closely on how the mothers described and attributed meaning to the discussions, decisions and negations that took place

within their families, and with external institutions, when arranging childcare during their imprisonment. I also reflect on the different power dynamics at play within these decision-making processes.

5.3.1 "It's Family so They Should Stay Together"

All the mothers expressed the ideal living arrangements for their children whilst they were imprisoned would be for them to stay with immediate family, although this was not an option available to all mothers (see subsections 5.3.2 and 5.3.3). Family members who the mothers identified as providing primary care for their children ranged from their current partners (Kayla), ex-partners (Donna; Malika), mothers (Chante; Linda; Malika; Trish), sisters (Joy; Sharon) and adult daughters (Sharon) revealing the different support systems available to and *perhaps* preferred by each mother. Within the mothers' extended familial networks, adult women were identified as the most common, and preferred, primary caregivers during imprisonment. However, caregiving was not solely understood in relation to living arrangements. Many mothers identified a network of people including brothers, sisters, adult daughters, mothers-in-law, and friends who also provided nurture, care and support care to their children whilst they were imprisoned. This reflects the arguments of Collins (1987) and Reynolds (2005) that within Black familial and social networks caregiving or *motherwork* is often constructed as a communal responsibility that is distributed across and between households, and it was these existing collective networks that appeared to provide the foundations for support during imprisonment.

Before attending court, Trish described being very open with her daughter, wider family and daughter's school about the likelihood of her receiving a custodial sentence. She viewed the lead up to her trial as a time to put things in place (such as setting up her daughter's new bedroom) and establish systems of support, that would make the "*transition for [her] daughter a little bit easier*" - forms of what I term 'Preparatory Motherwork'. Such activities reinforced a continued connection to her mothering identity and demonstrated the purposive development of new mothering strategies necessary for survival in response to the possibility of imprisonment. For Trish, part of this 'Preparatory Motherwork' during the court process also involved deciding where her daughter would live whilst she was imprisoned:

"It wasn't an easy decision cuz my mums not well, so I didn't want to leave such like a burden on my mum. And my mother-in-law, she wanted to have my daughter. She did have more like you know space and things and her mobility's better. But, my mum, she put in calls to everyone in my family and was like 'Oh my gosh have you heard what she's thinking of doing?'" Sending my child to her grandmother', 'How dare she' [smiles]. So yeah, [laughs]. We ended up, literally my mum would have her throughout the week and then my mother-in-law would just offer support wherever she needed it and then my big sister was like the person... she was like the teacher... You know it was really important for me that even though this was happening to us - more me - but it was happening to us, it was really important for me that my daughter's education didn't get affected by it."

Trish constructed the decision-making process regarding her pre-adolescent daughter's living arrangements as something that was discussed and negotiated between family members. She recalled her mother being extremely offended by the possibility of her granddaughter staying somewhere else: *"My mum was just like 'Oh hell no, it's my grandchild, she's coming to me'"*. Highlighting these conversations revealed Trish's understanding of the importance her mother had placed on being able to *do grandmothering* whilst she had been imprisoned. Her final decision was thus not necessarily based on her perception of the best resources but rather a sensitivity to familial emotions and dynamics. However, Trish also acknowledged how her mother-in-law and big sister had also been involved in caregiving alongside her mother, revealing the wider-familial networks of support and resources available to her daughter and the purposive roles different family members fulfilled. Motherwork associated with imprisoned mothering is thus undertaken not only by imprisoned mothers but also family members who come together to mitigate against the disruptive impacts of maternal imprisonment on children.

Like Trish, Sharon also had concerns for the *"burden"* she was placing on family members who were currently involved in caring for her teenage son:

"I have got brothers and sisters, but they've got their own family, they're own issues... I even felt bad having him with his sister even though she's got two young ones and I just felt really guilty to burden her with this teenage rebellious little boy. But I just thought it's family so they should stay together and help each other through it. But it was hard work, it still is hard work."

Sharon's beliefs and values regarding family life appeared to inform the importance she placed on her son staying with his close relatives. However, the responsibility that had now been placed on her older children and siblings to keep her family together left Sharon feeling extremely "guilty" and "bad" as she was not available to maintain this togetherness and structure herself whilst imprisoned.

Whilst extended family networks were understood as being available to Sharon for support, in keeping with academic literature regarding Black and Black Caribbean mothering (Enos 2011; Reynolds 2005), actually utilising these networks during imprisonment appeared to place a particular strain on familial dynamics. Conceptualising this familial adjustment as "work" for everyone involved, Sharon's narrative further informs my argument that Black imprisoned mothers and their families are forced to develop new strategies for, and organisations of, mothering in response to the disruptive and harmful contexts of imprisonment, reflecting processes of resonsbilisation. Interestingly, Sharon described her son as playing a prominent role in deciding which family member he would stay with and as a result he had moved between three different households (including his sisters and his aunt). Explaining her son's motivations behind these changes, Sharon stated: "*His sisters they tell him off... He was there [one of the sister's houses] for a year and he says, 'Oh I'm not staying with her no more mum' [laughs]*". Sharon's family thus appeared to utilise a communal approach to caregiving as several households were made available for her son to seek nurture and support within and his living arrangements were constructed as an active and ongoing process.

In keeping with Enos's (2001) research with Black mothers in America (see section 3.7) many of the mothers I spoke with had extended networks of support available to take on the day-to-day care of their children. However, both Trish and Sharon's narratives provided further insight into the conversations and negotiations that take place within families to establish routines for support, as well as the role of other caregivers, who do not live with the child but also partake in caregiving. It is also through these narratives that decisions surrounding caregiving and child placement become constructed as practices associated with imprisoned mothering. Portraying an active involvement in decision-making thus becomes a means of representing the type of mothering imprisoned mothers can engage in despite their imprisonment. It is important to

acknowledge, however, that not all mothers have access to such decisions, which I explore in the two subsections that follow.

5.3.2 “They Called That the Dumping Ground”

During her time imprisoned on remand, Chante’s son was cared for by his maternal grandmother who had also previously experienced imprisonment. Chante felt that her son was “*Very much a nanny’s boy*” and this had made the transition of their separation *somewhat* easier for him as she stated: “*Having my mum kind of softened the not having me*”. However, despite her son “*automatically*” going to stay with her mother, Chante detailed how the prison had contacted social services following her induction without her knowledge:

“They ask you like a series of questions on your way in like ‘do you have kids’, ‘do you have benefits’ and then they don’t tell you why. But then they contact them and let them know you’re there. So, the woman automatically booked - cuz when you’re a social worker you can book a visit without asking me... And then when she did her assessments, she told me that she didn’t think my mum was a suitable carer.”

It was eventually decided by the social worker that *if* Chante were to be found guilty and sentenced to imprisonment, her son would then be placed in local authority care. Chante’s narrative thus reveals the relative powerlessness of imprisoned mothers whose children are vulnerable to not only maternal separation but also familial separation.

Chante’s experience reflects the relationship that Roberts (2012:1474) identifies between the prison and local authority care systems, which she argues “function jointly to penalise the most marginalised women in our society”. Due to racial stereotyping, and punitive responses to poverty and racial injustice, such systems often view Black families as “unfit” caregivers (Roberts 2012:1486), as highlighted by Chante when she stated “*We all know our families and friends and stuff... But like, social services and the police look at us [differently]*”. Roberts (2012) argues that these perceptions result in a preference to separate Black children from their families rather than providing necessary support services, resources and care. For Black mothers who are overrepresented within prisons (Cardale et al 2017), whose children are overrepresented in local authority care (Bywaters et al 2016) and who are less likely than the national average to be reunited with their children following a period of separation (Owen and

Statham 2009), the intersections of such systems are argued to be particularly harmful (Roberts 2012). Considering what it felt like to hear, understand and come to terms with the decision made by social services whilst remanded, Chante reflected:

“Social services were using things from our past. Stuff that doesn’t directly affect me... But now that I’ve had time to look at it, I understand what her concerns was because I’d be concerned too. ... But obviously it’s the house I grew up in, so I am always going to feel differently. I didn’t die, you know? It may not have been what’s best for my son but ... We have so many family members, but the only option would be for him to be in care? [That] scared me... And especially how I look at it. Like I had Tracy Beaker and they called that the dumping ground. And I thought my son’s going to be at the dumping ground... Like getting my family to understand that this is what they [social services] are concerned about was also the next hardest thing because my family don’t do well with bad news. My mum felt criticised, judged...I mean her [the social worker’s] concerns were valid.... Honestly, it’s very hard if your family weren’t taking it seriously. And that’s what the social worker said. She felt my mum was brushing things off and ... And there’s not a lot you can do from where you’re sitting.”

Chante’s retrospective narrative demonstrates the difficulty she faced navigating the strained relationship between her family and social services whilst remanded and the potential consequences of this for the future care of her son. She expressed feeling frustrated with her family for not taking social services “seriously” and felt powerless in her ability to encourage them to “*paint the ceiling White*” - seemingly a metaphor for meeting their requirements and standards of mothering. It is particularly powerful that she draws upon the imagery of painting the “*ceiling White*” as a means of illustrating conformity here, with the White paint perhaps acting as a metaphorical representation of the White institutional norms and expectations underpinning systems of social and local authority care (see Roberts 2012), that Chante and her family were expected to adopt and adhere to. Such expectations also reflect racialised and gendered processes of ‘responsibilisation’ (see section 1.9), that positioned Chante as responsible for managing the relationship between social services and her family whilst imprisoned as well as meeting - or failing to meet - the requirements set by social services with little consideration given to the personal and institutional conditions that shaped her families’ experiences.

It is also interesting, that Chante’s narrative jumps between her remembered feelings at the time of her imprisonment and her later understandings of the situation after her release. As she was no longer suffering the immediate threat of imprisonment - or of her son being taken

into care - the removal of this sense of danger may have enabled her to consider the situation in a new light. Imprisonment had thus seemingly forced Chante to consider the world through “*the police and social services*” eyes and this had led to new understandings of her own lived experiences. However, her previous feelings of anxiety, distress and hurt remained present as she recalled the emotional weight of the possibility of her son being taken into care.

Seemingly, it was feelings of institutional judgement that had appeared to damage the relationship between Chante’s family in the community and social services. Her account of her mother feeling “*criticised and judged*” by social services demonstrates how constructions of ‘*bad mothering identities*’, explored in the academic literature (see Baldwin 2018; Baldwin 2019; Baldwin 2021; Shamai and Rinat-Billy 2008), can extend to family members also engaged in caring for the children of imprisoned mothers. Her narrative thus highlights how it is not only mothers who are impacted by the intersections of remand, imprisonment and local authority care but also children who may be taken into care and wider family networks whose mothering resources may also come under the scrutiny of such systems - a scrutiny that Roberts (2012) argues is heightened for Black families as a result of racialised discrimination.

It is important to mention here that after six months Chante was released after being found not guilty and her son, who was being looked after by his grandmother, was returned to her care demonstrating the distinctly disruptive experience of being ‘remanded’. In 2019, 40% women being held on remand who appeared in Crown Court did not receive an immediate custodial sentence in comparison to 65% of women, and more specifically 73% of Black women who appeared in the Magistrates’ court, demonstrating the overuse of remand in the lives of women (Howard League for Penal Reform 2020). These figures, when considered alongside Chante’s narrative, provide further support of Black feminist abolitionist arguments in light of the disruptive and harmful impact of remand on women, Black families and communities as well society more broadly. Working towards ending the use of remand, which disproportionately impacts Black women and their children⁵⁴ could begin the process of reducing the overall size of the prison population. This would challenge possibilities of prison expansion that are likely

⁵⁴ Children categorised as Black and Mixed-race were the most likely racialised group to be remanded in youth custody when controlling for offence-related and demographic factors (Youth Justice Board 2021).

to exacerbate racialised inequality, whilst also moving us more closely towards an eventual goal of eradicating a societal reliance on the current prison system altogether (see Lambie 2022).

5.3.3 Temporary Foster Care

Annette was the only mother I spoke with whose child was in foster care “because of [her] coming to prison” and she described this as being the “hardest bit” of her sentence. Like Chante, Annette also had reservations about the care system as she expressed: “The prospect of a child going into foster care is the last thing anyone wants for their child”. Whilst Annette did not have control over the decision of where her daughter would live during her imprisonment, she did construct a sense of agency when describing how her daughter had been culturally matched with her temporary foster carer who was also of Caribbean heritage. According to Ofsted (2020:19), in England there is “there is no legal requirement in fostering to match children’s ethnicity, culture, language and faith with the background of their carers” however fostering services should consider and respect a child’s cultural background and identity (HM Government 2005). Annette placed importance on cultural matching as she wanted her daughter to be cared for by people who were familiar to herself so that she would feel more at home, maintain a sense of normality and be able to “eat what she’s used to eating”.

Through their research with foster families, Rees et al (2010: 101) identified food as a means of developing “a sense of cohesion between reconstituted families” as it provides a space for people to come together. However, Amongi (2020: para 1) argues that for children in foster care the “symbolic significance of food” also acts to provide and perhaps maintain, a close connection to one’s “identity and cultural heritage” reinforcing feelings of belonging. Annette’s decision to advocate for her daughter to have a culturally matched foster placement reveals the type of ‘Preparatory Motherwork’ she was able to engage as in imprisoned mother during the early stages of imprisonment. Reynolds (2020:5) highlights how nurturing the racialised identities of children is an essential part of Black mothering “in a society that does not recognise their worth”. However, during imprisonment these strategies must take new forms. Whilst Annette could not be at home with her daughter, this new form of motherwork (advocating for a culturally matched placement) meant she felt she could potentially have

some influence on shaping social services understanding of her daughter's racialised and cultural needs and thus the types of nurture she would be receiving whilst in foster care.

Annette also placed emphasis in her narrative on the networks of support available to her daughter outside of her foster placement:

"I've got a brother and his partner and he's got [several] children. He was in [A country abroad] ... Then this has happened he's had to come back...Because he's not in fixed accommodation yet my daughter spends most weekends with them until they get sorted which is probably going to be a while So yeah, she has got family on the outside which does, she does find it much easier now he's come back. Because she's got her cousins. She's got him. She's got support. So, it's got its ups and downs."

For Annette, explaining her brother's role in providing care to her daughter despite their separate living arrangements may have been a way of portraying and maintaining her connection to her extended family. Her brother and his family were described as providing emotional caregiving and nurture and were thus constructed as an essential system of familial support, reflecting broader arguments relating to collective mothering and familial caregiving (Collins 1987; Collins 1990; Reynolds 2005). Annette's narrative provides additional evidence for my argument proposed in subsection 5.3.1 that many of the mothers I spoke with understood caregiving as something that could exist outside of the boundaries of living arrangements and specific households. However, in light of this connectedness, imprisonment was described as having a disruptive and destabilising impact on the whole family - with Annette's brother, his partner and their children having to move and not yet having secured "*fixed accommodation*" - further demonstrating the pervasive nature of its harm. The next section refocuses on the mothers' more direct experiences of mothering and considers the types of caregiving they themselves were able to personally provide to their children whilst imprisoned.

5.4 Mothering Through Prison Walls

Whilst all the mothers' narratives established the constraining, disruptive and harmful impact of imprisonment for themselves, their children and wider families, many of their narratives also provided insights into how they had attempted to or were actively mitigating against these barriers with new or adapted approaches to mothering. This section focuses on some of the

purposive and active strategies that the mothers described utilising whilst mothering *through* the prison walls, with consideration given to the role of such narratives in affirming the mothers' desired identities that were challenged by imprisonment (see also Lockwood 2018). Attention is also given to the institutional contexts of open conditions and the experience of mothering within this environment. It is important to acknowledge here, that elements of the mothers' narratives where they emphasise their strategies for mothering whilst imprisoned also feed into wider discourses that highlight how Black mothers are often expected to be strong and resilient for their families in the face of adversity (see sections 2.7 and 2.9).

5.4.1 Mothering Strategies

I have chosen to focus in this section on the mothers' strategies for mothering through the prison walls which enabled them to maintain a maternal presence in their children's lives, within the limitations of imprisonment. Before exploring some of these strategies, it is necessary to recognise that many of the mothers discussed several barriers to mothering, also reflected in the wider literature such as, but not limited to, the lack of efficiency from social services in supporting child contact (see also Baldwin 2015; Rees et al 2017), the cost of travelling to and from visits (see also HM Inspectorate of Prisons 2009; Rees et al 2017), limited access to family days, the unsuitability of normal 'social visits' for children (Rees et al 2020) and racism (see Chapter Six). It is therefore not the case that elements of the mothers' narratives which centre strategies for mothering whilst imprisoned diminish the barriers they faced, but rather reveal the types of motherwork they often actively had to engage in to mitigate against the repressive and constrictive contexts of imprisonment for their children and grandchildren.

Whilst at Greenhill, Sharon, had not allowed her grandchildren to visit or know about her imprisonment because she believed they were "*too young*" and she didn't "*want them to have that memory*". Malika had also made a similar decision regarding her children, and did not see them for fifteen months, as she stressed: "*I don't want them to have those thoughts or even think of even entering a prison... I put them first.*". So, for some imprisoned mothers, "suspending [physical] contact" (Lockwood 2018:164) with children became rationalised as necessary forms of what I term 'Protective Motherwork'. However, despite not receiving visits

from her grandchildren, Sharon described purposefully engaging in other types of mothering activities:

“She used to always say ‘Nanny where are you? I wanna come and stay at your house and sleep in your bed’ and I’d get all choked up, I don’t know what to say. But I kept calling and always speaking to her because she’s always at home. I do those storybooks...And she loves it! When I call, she says – she didn’t understand about the CD – she said: ‘nanny I can hear your voice on that round thing!’ ‘I liked the story nanny.’”

Phone calls and Storybook Mums⁵⁵ were constructed by Sharon as mothering activities that somewhat enabled her to maintain her grandmother identity during imprisonment. Emphasising the familiarity between herself and her granddaughter thus became a means of challenging and resisting the constraining nature of imprisonment on her mothering relationships, reclaiming a sense of power within an environment that is built on the act of removing it. Such approaches to mothering are conceptualised here as a form of ‘Connective Motherwork’, as emphasis is placed on lessening the emotional separation caused by physical separation during imprisonment.

Discussing the financial implications of phone contact with her daughter, Annette noted:

“£15, that will see me from Wednesday to Wednesday. So, I’ll call her in the morning for a few minutes, call her in the evening and as long as she’s okay the £15 will last. If she’s having a bad week I could be on the phone to her and spend £5 in one phone call and it can be quite stressful because I’ve got what I earn here which is £15 a week and that literally covers the phone.”

Part of Annette’s ‘Connective Motherwork’ whilst imprisoned was therefore undertaking paid employment to cover the cost of phone calls to her teenage daughter as well as then strategically distributing her earnings throughout the week to maintain contact consistently and frequently. However, as people in prison are not protected under the National Minimum Wage Act (1998) Annette’s earnings were minimal and this resulted in there being very little contingency to meet her daughter’s changing needs.

⁵⁵ Storybook Mums and Storybook Dads is an activity often led by charities where people in prison can be audio-recorded whilst reading a children’s storybook and these recordings are posted to their families.

Additionally, Trish described how she had developed new strategies for mothering during imprisonment:

“I felt bad because I wasn’t there for her education. So, my mum was like ‘You can still be there’. ... I started communicating directly with my daughter’s school. They would tell me what she’s currently learning, and I would make up my own little work sheets that I would post home.... And literally my daughter would do her bits post it back and I’d mark it ... It was like me being able to help her with her homework properly ... And I’m so glad I done that... Just because I’ve gone to prison my mum hat doesn’t switch off, I’m just now in an environment where I can’t be hands-on.”

Trish’s retrospective narrative portrays how she navigated sustaining involvement in her daughter’s education – an aspect of mothering she attributed great importance, despite the “environment” of imprisonment which had prevented her from being able to do this type of ‘Connective Motherwork’ in the way that she was used to⁵⁶. Illustrating her innovative approach to mothering whilst imprisoned also reaffirmed access to her perception of a good mothering *identity* which had been challenged by the restrictive nature of imprisonment and the “guilt” she held regarding her imprisonment. Defining the types of motherwork she engaged in whilst imprisoned, therefore, became a means of demonstrating her commitment to, and importance she placed on, raising her daughter. Trish understood her particular focus on education as being influenced by her own experienced of being mothered:

“I come from a big Caribbean family ... In the 90s [my brothers] was tearaway kids so my mum had some issues with them getting in trouble with the police and things like that... So, my mum was like very open with me. She was like look at what your brothers have got themselves into, look where they are, you don’t wanna be here. This is why education and that was a very big thing to me and my sisters, and I understand when you get in trouble with the police it can impact your life ... trying to get a job when you’ve got a criminal record goes against you.”

Within Trish’s family, therefore, emphasis was placed on protecting children from generational patterns of criminalisation and state intervention in the lives of Black Caribbean children and

⁵⁶ Annette and Malika also discussed their children’s education but in relation to the impact the trauma of their imprisonment had on their children’s grades. Part of their motherwork was thus constructed as “getting them back” (Malika) to where they had been before imprisonment and mitigating against such harms.

the subsequent barriers faced because of these processes through maintaining an active involvement in their education. Education was thus constructed not only as a *connective* but also *protective* mothering strategy. Importantly, like many of the mothers, Trish did not feel the prison had supported her ability to do this *motherwork*. Instead, emphasis was placed on support from an external organisation:

“I told the people from Pact [Prison Advice and Care Trust] that I liked doing homework for my daughter and stuff so they would bring over lots of different like maths homework sheets ... and so that’s where when it came to being a parent, I got my support from Pact.”

It is important to note, many of the mothers also named external organisations such as Pact, Birthing Companions and The Hardman Trust as providing key information and personal support relating to mothering, perinatal care and child contact. Building upon these narratives relating to strategies for imprisoned mothering, the following subsection considers opportunities for, and restrictions placed on, mothering within prison open conditions.

5.4.2 Open Conditions

“Until I got to open prison, I don’t feel like I had any support being a mum - nothing whatsoever.” Trish

Towards the end of their sentences, Annette, Donna, Linda, Malika, Sharon and Trish had all experienced imprisonment within open prison conditions and constructed these *relatively* ‘open’ environments as providing more opportunities for *doing* their “mummy role” (Trish). When highlighting the types of ‘Connective Motherwork’ available in open conditions Annette, Donna, Sharon, Tamika and Trish all listed a range of mothering activities they engaged in. Many of these activities included fun days out such as taking their children “ice-skating” (Annette) and “bowling” (Donna) but also included more mundane and everyday activities such as washing clothes (Trish), helping with homework (Malika, Trish), and preparing meals (Sharon), as demonstrated in the following two quotes:

“I take him out we do things, we cook, I do his hair – I just do the things I would do if I was back home full time.” Sharon

“Cuz like with my daughter and stuff, I’ll do her hair - canerow her hair, see her, do her homework with her and everything else like that. That’s all I can do.” Malika

The mothers’ portrayal of the types of motherwork they had engaged in during periods of Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) provides an insight into their understanding of ‘good’ mothering activities which had largely been restricted by imprisonment. These depictions enabled the mothers to partially reclaim access to their desired mothering identities, although still within the limits of imprisonment, linking back to Arendell’s (2000) and Cunningham Stringer’s (2020) arguments that the construction of mothering identities is closely linked to definitions of mothering activities (see section 3.9). Importantly, both Sharon and Malika constructed *doing* or *canerowing* their children’s hair as primary mothering activities in their home lives. Meadows-Fernandez (2022: para 18) argues doing or canerowing hair is a tradition often linked to Black mothering as the practice “is as much about nurturing and instilling a strong identity and sense of community in our children as it is about the art of meticulously interlacing strands of hair”. The practice of doing hair thus becomes a form of motherwork that nourishes both maternal and cultural connections, reinforcing the bond between mother and child.

Donna’s narrative also revealed the sense of security and routine that she was able to re-establish with her son whilst in Greenhill:

“I am able to have that contact, and that relationship and I don’t have anxiety on a daily basis of what he’s doing... He can text me when I put my phone on and there’s a real secure - he knows he’s gonna see mum every other week and he knows he goes away for five days with me. So, that that’s helped tremendously...He’s [nearly a teenager] he doesn’t want to speak on the phone every day. He doesn’t even have that need. He knows when he’s gonna see me. He knows it’s happening ... There’s a stability there. So, I think he’s really well-adjusted because of me being in open [or] ... I think there would be something between us like a barrier.”

Whilst in open conditions Donna was able to maintain aspects of her and her son’s “old life” that would have been inaccessible to her in closed conditions. Providing a sense of stability was perceived as an important type a motherwork for Donna and during our conversation she also emphasised how maintaining a relationship with the mothers at her son’s school had further supported a sense of “continuity” in his life as their social circles had not had to change because

of her imprisonment. In contrast to closed conditions, therefore, open conditions were largely constructed as more conducive to the mothers desired approaches to mothering.

However, the mothers' narratives also constructed open conditions as leading to *new* maternal pains of imprisonment. Unlike the other mothers I spoke with, Annette had not been able to experience an overnight stay with her daughter whilst in open conditions:

"My social worker is coming in to visit me today hopefully to sort overnight visits ... Because obviously coming into prison you lose your accommodation, so I've got nowhere to stay overnight with her. But I believe they may be able to fund overnight stays so I'm waiting to get that sorted and that will be brilliant. She needs, she literally does just need - She said: 'Mum just to lay down and watch a film and cuddle up with you'. That's all she wants."

Annette's opportunities for mothering were limited by her experience of imprisonment, however, such constraints were redefined within the context of open conditions. Whilst she was able to see her daughter in the community and engage in certain types of mothering such as going out "to eat" and going for "a ride in the park", she was not able to mother overnight because imprisonment had rendered her homeless. A vast body of literature has acknowledged the impact of imprisonment on housing, with the IMB (2020) identifying 25% of the 80 women they interviewed had lost their homes due to imprisonment. However, Annette's narrative reveals the impact such marginalisation has not only on life after prison but also on life in open conditions, as mothers who do not have access to places to stay during Child Care Resettlement License (CRL) will not have access to the same opportunities for mothering in the community as those who do.

Malika's narrative also demonstrates the strain placed on mothers who must individually decide how to manage their time in the community:

"If you pick up a job, you have to work those hours. But then that takes time you could spend with your kids; do you see what I'm saying? If I'm on home leave for two weeks out of the month I've still got to pay out of my own money whilst working that job to come back to these areas [The prison] which doesn't work out financially feasible in terms of how much you earn. Cuz if you work for someone you only make £50, if that, a day. It's ridiculous. It just doesn't correlate. So, I didn't wanna take that time away from

the kids because I've been absent for so long. It's just not fair on them. Yeah so, that's why I said let me wait 'til I get out."

The guilt Malika experienced because of being imprisoned and away from her children thus informed her decision of not entering employment during her time in open conditions. Although she had worked before her imprisonment and had placed emphasis on being able to “provide”, her current circumstances meant she now felt a pressure to spend as much time with her children as possible to compensate for the time they had *missed*. This finding is reflective of Gurusami’s (2019:134) description of the “crisis motherwork” undertaken by Black mothers after release whereby they would disengage from other responsibilities in order to focus solely on intensively mothering their children. Note, however, Malika was enrolled in a training course that required her to attend college two days a week. However, she also expressed feeling guilty as attending college prevented her from doing the school run, a mothering activity that had become available to her when on ROTL but was restricted by her educational responsibilities. Underpinning Malika’s narrative was also a sense that Greenhill, located in a rural setting, caused additional financial strain as she frequently referred to the cost of visiting children, attending college and potentially travelling to work for herself and the other imprisoned mothers.

Finally, open conditions were also associated with new forms of discriminatory treatment (see also Chapter 6), as described by Trish:

“...I would get spot checked but then my friend who - her dad owned his house that he built in Essex, she never got spot checked not once and it would always upset me. Of course, I’m not gonna be there grassing. But, it would upset me that your spot checking me and I’m just coming home to bloody wash clothes and prepare uniforms for next week and just do my mummy role and there’s people that you’ve never spot checked because on paper they look better than me. Because you know, they live in Essex and Brentford, their dad owns his own business, so you never spot check them. Meanwhile, they’re throwing big old parties on their home leaves inviting half of East London over.”

Within open conditions, the prison’s surveillance extends through the prison walls and into the lives of women when they reoccupy space within the community, which for Trish was felt to be disproportionately used against her as a working-class mother. These findings build upon Shammass’ (2014) argument that open conditions give rise to new pains of imprisonment due

to the juxtaposition of being both *imprisoned* and somewhat *free*. For imprisoned mothers, therefore, the confines of open conditions *still* act to restrict opportunities for mothering through whilst also exacerbating financial and housing inequalities for imprisoned mothers and their families. Whilst I have largely focused on experiences of *mothering through prison walls* in this chapter and the harms associated with maternal separation, in the section that follows I turn my attention to experiences of *mothering within the prison walls* during pregnancy and following childbirth.

5.5 Mothering Within Prison Walls

As discussed by Nuytiens and Jahaes (2022), the majority of literature focuses on mothering experiences during imprisonment in relation to maternal separation. This section therefore highlights Joy's retrospective narrative of imprisoned mothering *within* the prison walls with emphasis placed on her experience of becoming a mother for the first time whilst serving a long-term prison sentence and also being categorised as a Black *and* 'foreign national prisoner' (an individual without British citizenship). Although this section focuses on Joy's experience during pregnancy and on an MBU it is important to note, both Chante and Kayla also discussed MBUs but in relation to their reasons for *not* applying. Reasons for not applying included the anxiety of separation after developing a maternal bond: "*You get to carry them, hold them for two years, and then what just hand them over? I think I would be a mess*" (Chante), not wanting children to be imprisoned "*My baby needs to learn about the outside world*" (Kayla) and a lack of trust in prison staff: "*I might have done something in the week and then they take it out on my baby*" (Kayla).

5.5.1 Joy's Experience

Joy and her husband had travelled to England on a "*visiting visa*" prior to their imprisonment. Whilst remanded Joy found out she was pregnant with her first child:

"My conversation with the doctor was that: 'It's gonna be pretty hard to have a baby in prison but don't worry there are other options you can actually go for abortion ... you know cuz it's gonna be pretty rough and all that', and I'm thinking I don't want to...I wasn't sure of anything, but I was sure that I didn't want to have an abortion. And I don't know how I came about it, having that strength to say that cuz I was really a foreigner. I didn't have documents to live in this country... I have visiting visa if you know

what I mean? ... So, when that was suggested to me very easily, I just thought no I'm not gonna. There's so much I don't know, so much I can't do, but taking the life of a child an unborn baby is not one of them. I just said to him 'I'm not gonna have an abortion'. So, in the end I left and I just went to my cell and I cried and cried."

Joy's narrative emphasises the relative powerlessness she had felt as an imprisoned Black pregnant woman who was also categorised within the prison system as a 'foreign national'. The doctor's guidance, from a position of authority, enforced a notion that it would not be appropriate for her to continue her pregnancy, questioning her value as an imprisoned mother. Her awareness of the relative lack of power she had within the institutional space of the prison thus extended to the sense of power she felt she had over her own body and her pregnancy, revealing the "*intrusive*" and invasive (Chante) nature of imprisonment.

In support of this, drawing upon Black feminist theory Hayes et al (2020:21) argues that imprisonment, which disproportionality impacts Black women, "comprises and undermines bodily autonomy" as it reduces the capacity for "people to make decisions about their reproductive wellbeing and bodies" reducing their access to *choice*, an arguably inevitable consequence of imprisonment. Reproductive justice, as introduced in section 3.8, is thus incompatible with the prison and its design which aims to restrict, regulate and control the body and the mind (Cavanagh et al 2022; Foucault 1975). It is not possible to have justice in a site of oppression. According to hooks (1984), "being oppressed means the absence of choices". Although Joy did assert choice in relation to her pregnancy, the fact she felt she needed "*strength*" to do this, because of the coercive power and weight of the institution (Foucault 1975), reflected her experience of disempowerment as a Black imprisoned mother. It is important to stress however, for Joy, this feeling of "reproductive oppression" (Hayes et al 2020: 21) was also compounded by her understanding of herself as a "*foreigner*", an identity she described throughout our conversation as marginalised within the criminal justice system (see also section 6.3.2 Bosworth 2010 and Tomaszewska 2016.).

The political construction and instability of Joy's "*foreigner*" status thus acted to diminish her sense of autonomy, belonging and security which led her to question the *right* she had to voice her own opinion and make decisions surrounding her motherhood within a country in which she did not have "*documents to live*". In keeping with wider literature relating to the

intersections of racialisation and migration more broadly, therefore, constructions of citizenship within the prison system, through the classification of ‘foreign national prisoners’, further demonstrates how immigration policies and controls create “hierarchies of belonging” (Back and Sinha 2016:521). Such arguments thus reinforce Noronha’s (2018:2418) argument that “Britain should be examining questions of belonging in legal as much as cultural terms, examining the weight of legal categorisations in the formation of identities”. Constructions of citizenship within the prison system can thus be understood as processes of racialisation which when intersected with definitions of Blackness create particular experiences of, and opportunities for, mothering and motherhood.

The cultural stigma Joy faced from her family surrounding her imprisonment also added to her existing feelings of marginalisation:

“I had brought the family down and I had disgraced everyone. It’s harder for someone from my background ... it was very negative although it was not publicised. But internally it was scornful.”

However, she felt a pressure to manage and suppress such feelings:

“I wanted to make sure that I don’t stress myself too much and then lose the baby. I became very paranoid... I felt really, really lonely there and depressed.”

Imprisonment negatively impacted Joy’s perinatal mental health. The pressure of having “someone whose life [was] depending on [her]” within an environment that was not conducive to nurture and care was extremely destabilising and this was heightened by a lack of support and an internalised sense of shame. These experiences of judgment and isolation were also magnified during her time on the MBU which she had moved to a month before the birth of her son. She described the MBU as being “the same as the prison setting”, with “the same rules” but slightly less “rigid”. Sharing her experience returning to the MBU following childbirth, Joy recollected:

“I was much more worried that people was watching if I was coping... Cuz it was very hard to get on the mother and baby unit, and peoples kids I understand are easily taken if they see that you are not coping... So, that makes me very anxious. Like really trying and pushing myself. Not really enjoying that I’m a new mother... Didn’t have the luxury

of even acting like you were not on top of things ... You didn't get any help... It was just each mother to their babies. There was no relief to say 'Ok take baby for a few minutes' or something like that... When I know, we are used to, from where I come from you know, like having that time or space. I didn't get that at all...I missed that because I knew [if I was at home] ... I would've been pampered ... I'm not really blaming anybody but that's how I felt. There was nothing there for new mums. Nothing there for mums who never had experiences before ... to come in and teach the mums to say, 'It's ok not to feel okay' ... I don't wish for anybody to have that experience."

This feeling of surveillance on the MBU, echoed Joy's previous feelings of institutional intrusion during pregnancy. Under this surveillance Joy felt she had to prove she was a 'good' mother who was doing everything "right" to ensure her baby would not be "taken" away, an example of 'Protective Motherwork'. Striving to maintain an image of 'perfection' under the repressive gaze of the institution thus influenced her presentation of mothering within the MBU⁵⁷. However, this presentation of self was not congruent to her actual feelings and needs, preventing her ability to seek support or being identified as in need of care.

Positioning Joy's narrative within the wider context of Black motherhood it is also important to recognise the likely additional pressure of displaying "coping" against a social backdrop that often scrutinises Black mothers whilst simultaneously expecting them to be strong and resilient (see Chapter Two). The pressure Joy felt to display "coping" is thus revealing of the wider social processes of 'responsibilisation' (see O'Malley 2009) that appear to result in Black imprisoned mothers having to demonstrate personal resilience and independence in the absence of institutional "help" and "relief" (see also Inquest 2023). Notably, Joy's narrative also contrasts her experience of isolation during the time she spent on the MBU (that being less than a year) to her expectation of what early motherhood would have been like at home with her family in a communal or "joined" (Joy) mothering space that provided the support she valued and needed. Imprisonment thus not only acted to restrict Joy's presentation of mothering, but also separated her from the "joined" approach to caregiving she desired.

After less than a year on the MBU, Joy's son went to live with her sister in the community:

⁵⁷ Note, these findings also reflect wider literature relating to MBUs outside of contexts of penal imprisonment (see Mannay et al 2018).

“From day one I knew that I knew that I was pregnant I’m already fearing that I’m not going to be with my baby. So, you can imagine from day one having that knowledge. That was what was scary for me... Not having him meant that I wasn’t complete... Yeah, felt like you’ve got something, but you’ve lost it ... But then continuing him having my milk - there was no plans for that because they didn’t have that facility where I can express it and have it taken by them to give him... But I would have loved for him to have more milk even though you know, it wasn’t gonna be feasible.”

Joy’s bodily autonomy was thus further restricted by her inability to continuing breastfeeding or expressing milk whilst imprisoned, an act of mothering she attributed great importance. Abbott and Scott (2017:217) argue that whilst many women can make personal decisions around breastfeeding, “perinatal women in prison are less able to make this choice due to systems of power and control”. Linking back in with hooks (1984:5) discussion surrounding oppression and “the absence of choices”, imprisonment thus creates boundaries for nurture and nourishment that oppress and restrict opportunities for mothering, removing social possibilities for reproductive justice.

Guided by feminist abolitionist ethics, working towards a society rooted in reproductive justice would require, on the one hand, the gradual dismantling of the prison estate that imposes reproductive oppression (Cavanagh et al 2022). At the same time, and most importantly this would necessitate the development of, and an investment in, community organisations and social strategies for preventing and repairing harm as well as delivering justice and ensuring accountability in ways that do not put mothers and their children at further risk of harm (Cavanagh et al 2022). A reproductive justice framework places importance on ensuring all families have access to satisfactory health and social care, education, employment, secure housing and safety from violence, through its emphasis on human rights and social justice (Hayes et al 2020). I therefore argue that wider socio-political change is required to better prevent and respond to the root causes of inequality, criminalisation and violence in the community. This would ensure that mothers like Joy do not have to experience mothering beneath the weight of such a punitive environment. The following section considers the oppressive nature of imprisonment in relation to wider family dynamics.

5.6 Fragmented Families

It is also necessary to acknowledge the impact that imprisonment has on parental dynamics. Chante, Joy, Kayla and Trish had all been in romantic parental relationships before imprisonment, however, at the time of our conversation only Trish remained in her relationship. Both Trish and Joy were imprisoned at the same time as their partners, however, Trish's partner had already served several years before her own imprisonment. Trish was not able to have a joint visit with both her partner and her daughter for the first eighteen months of her imprisonment, until she 'progressed' to open conditions where she described having to "fight" the system for a visit to be permitted:

"It's important to uphold family ties and bonds. He is my family. My immediate family and the father to my daughter. To me there's no tie or bond more important than our threes."

Trish's retrospective narrative reveals how her experience of family life was not constructed as binary, she was not a mother separate to being a partner and the "three" of their identities were intertwined with and dependent upon each other's. Reynolds (2005: 141) argues that research exploring Black mothering has often centred the role of family or community members in relation to shared mothering practices, but little attention has been given to the role of fathers arguing it is as though "Black men have been written out of discourses and debates on Black family life". Trish's partner was central to her sense of family life, and she placed great emphasis on maintaining this relationship despite the lengthy prison sentence he was still currently serving.

Reflecting on the breakdown of her relationship with her ex-husband during their past experience of imprisonment, Joy acknowledged:

"They were not allowing us that family time together. That's what was putting me and his dad more apart ... It made us like there was nothing to bring us together ... [It Drew] us more apart even though being in prison already has made it that way. You understand? There was nothing to prepare us to see it is going to end one day, to help us come together at some point like help us try to -yeah -unite and try together."

Like Trish, Joy felt the prison system had not catered to her family's needs as a unit and instead constructed her motherhood and her ex-husband's fatherhood as separate entities which

further “*strained*” their relationship. As Joy gave birth to their first child whilst imprisoned, they had only ever experienced parenthood as something isolated from one another and Joy attributed this to the loss of their marital relationship.

Additionally, Chante found out she was pregnant during her reception into prison with her ex-partner’s first child. However, he had been largely separated from the pregnancy during the six-months she was remanded. Chante recalled how “*upset*” he had been that was “*not part of a lot of things*” and the difficulties they faced trying to get him access to her antenatal appointments and scans. This separation from her ex-partner had made her “*...sadder, like I can’t enjoy this experience with my partner*”. When describing this feeling, Chante felt as though she sounded “*crazy*”. She questioned whether someone who had been imprisoned should be complaining about separation, as though she had now, in hindsight, begun to view such treatment as partially deserved or inevitable. Like Joy and Kayla, Chante’s relationship with her partner also broke down following imprisonment:

“I think my son’s dad wasn’t getting used to the idea of not having me around... You would think they’d fall apart but he was doing just fine... [He] was starting a whole other family because he thought I wasn’t coming home. It must’ve been a shock when I was released.”

Chante attributed the breakdown in her relationship to her partners lack of “*loyalty*” together with the distance placed between them during her time remanded. Overall, these findings demonstrate that for these mothers, imprisonment had not only redefined and restricted their mothering identities but also their partners/ex-partners fathering identities, their joined parenting dynamics, and their experiences of being “*together*” (Joy) as a familial unit.

It is also necessary here to recognise the pain experienced by mothers such as Trish whose partner was serving a long-term prison sentence, Joy who had served a prison sentence at the same time as her child’s father, as well as Chante and Annette who had also experienced the imprisonment of their mothers and/or other family members. This highlights the multiple ways in which imprisonment had fragmented and disrupted the lives of the mothers, supporting wider academic literature on the multifaceted and intergenerational impact of imprisonment for many Black and multiracial families (see also Roberts 2012). It is also important to

emphasise how the mothers who had experienced the imprisonment of their loved ones also often described experiencing economic marginalisation, implying a connection between poverty, criminalisation and familial imprisonment.

In keeping with a Black feminist approach (see Morgan 1999), therefore, the current prison system must be challenged- and justice must be reimagined - not only for Black mothers but also their families, communities and society more broadly. Investing in families and communities, rather than existing systems of criminal justice that perpetuate racialised, gendered, and classed inequalities, prevents imprisonment becoming yet another form of harm in the lives of *often* already marginalised people (Davis et al 2022; Gilmore 2020). Ensuring families and communities have access to necessary resources for preventing and repairing harm, creating safety and security, building opportunity and also reinforcing self-worth and value is essential for addressing marginalisation (Kaba 2017; Sultan and Herskind 2020). Emphasis must thus be placed on strategies that facilitate justice through togetherness, community and shared accountability, rather than separation, isolation and subjugation.

5.7 Concluding Thoughts

The mothers' narratives demonstrated what it meant for them to *do* and *feel* mothering whilst *being* imprisoned, with emphasis placed throughout the chapter on the individual and shared circumstances that appeared to shape such experiences. Through hearing the mothers' experiences and interpreting their narratives, it is apparent that imprisonment constricts, redefines and challenges existing and desired mothering identities and relationships which has serious consequences for the mental wellbeing of imprisoned mothers. It disrupts and strains the wider family dynamics in which mothering is often situated and is also seen to have a harmful impact on children, as a result of the trauma from being separated from their mothers as well as experiencing considerable changes to their everyday routines. These findings are supportive of existing feminist literature in America, that have emphasised the interconnected relationship between imprisonment and reproductive oppression (Cavanagh et al 2022; Hayes et al 2017).

Imprisoned mothering can be understood as a situational state that describes the emotions, practices, negotiations, arrangements that take place, or cannot take place, whilst a mother is confined in prison. Within this chapter, I have highlighted the strategies for mothering adopted by Black mothers to mitigate against the punitive, restrictive and harmful nature of imprisonment through an active engagement in new or adapted – albeit still limited and confined - types of *motherwork*. I have grouped these different types of motherwork into three distinct categories⁵⁸, ‘Preparatory’, ‘Connective’ and ‘Protective’ motherwork and together these categories provide a foundation for a typology of imprisoned mothering that will be further developed in the findings chapters that follow.

‘Preparatory Motherwork’ illustrates the work the mothers often engaged in to prepare themselves and their families for, as well as and mitigate against, the disruptive and harmful impacts of their imprisonment. ‘Connective Motherwork’ refers to strategies developed by the mothers to maintain a close relationship with their children and grandchildren during their imprisonment. Interestingly, this particular type of motherwork was often described by the mothers as being more accessible in open conditions. Finally, ‘Protective Motherwork’ encompasses the specific strategies utilised by the mothers to shield their children and grandchildren from the harms of imprisonment, such as by keeping them separate from the prison environment (section 5.4.1), concealing their imprisonment from them altogether (section 5.4.1) or giving the appearance of ‘coping’ to avoid intervention from officers (section 5.5.1).

In this chapter, I have also acknowledged how many of the mothers and their families assumed the *responsibility* of mitigating against the harms of imprisonment for themselves and their children in response to disproportionate intervention by the state and in the absence of formal institutional support. Some of the mothers described feeling pressured to display ‘coping’ to minimise the possibility of further state intervention and harm, which in turn prevented access to necessary emotional support (section 5.5.1). However, external expectations placed on Black mothers to show resilience, independence and strength (see section 2.7.2) was also seen

⁵⁸ It is important to stress that these categorises are not seen as fixed or universal. Rather they are positioned as responsive to each mother’s individual circumstances and the particular environments in which they had experienced imprisonment.

to restrict their access to appropriate care in the prison system (section 5.2.3). The prison environment was thus experienced as an environment that stood in opposition to the mother's care and safety, resulting in the development of individual strategies for survival.

In response to the mothers' narratives presented in this chapter, I have also drawn upon feminist and Black feminist abolitionist principles to stress the necessary development of new strategies for addressing harm and reimagining justice (see Davis 2003a; Kaba 2017). I have recognised how such strategies must exist outside of *and replace* contexts of imprisonment, in acknowledgment of the finding that prisons stand in contention to reproductive justice, safety and social care (Cavanagh et al 2022; Hayes et al 2020). Whilst I have focused on narratives of imprisoned mothering and reproductive oppression in this findings chapter, I focus more closely on narratives relating to racialisation, racism and imprisonment in the chapter that follows.

Chapter Six

The Racialised Pains of Maternal Imprisonment

“You grow up around young Black men going to prison so I thought it would be inclusive, but the racial tension was shocking. So much ignorance and prejudice especially towards Black women.” Trish

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored how the context of imprisonment redefines and challenges Black mothering identities and experiences in a way that is largely harmful for both mothers, their children and their families. In this chapter⁵⁹ I adopt a more specific focus for considering the racialised experiences of imprisonment for Black mothers. To do this, I explore narratives in which mothers closely reflected on their experience of navigating imprisonment whilst racialised as Black and the ‘*pains*’ sometimes associated with this. Whilst concern is still given to the mothers’ identities and experiences as mothers, a more pointed emphasis is placed on unpacking the different ways they conceptualised their racialised positionality in the context of imprisonment. Focusing on Black womanhood as well as motherhood also prevents mothers’ needs and experiences from being solely confined to their mothering roles. As with the previous chapter, both individual and shared narratives from the mothers are analysed using *thematic* and *performance* narrative analyses and some mothers’ experiences may appear more regularly in this chapter if they spoke more frequently and in-depth about their experiences through a racialised lens.

‘The pains of imprisonment’, a term originally coined by Sykes (1958), has been frequently used as a framework for understanding and articulating the psychologically painful consequences of being imprisoned as a form of punishment (see section 3.3). Building on this initial framework, as detailed in section 3.3, many prison scholars have since acknowledged new and additional pains of imprisonment experienced within particular historical contexts and by different groups⁶⁰. Both Crewe (2011) and Fleury-Steiner and Longazel (2013) ‘revisit’ the pains of

⁵⁹ Note, I have also presented some preliminary analysis of the findings discussed in this chapter at an academic conference and webinar (see Thomas 2020b and Thomas 2021b).

⁶⁰ See: The gendered pains of imprisonment (see Crewe et al 2017; Walker and Worrall 2000), transgender pains of imprisonment (see Maycock 2020), maternal pains of imprisonment (see Nuytiens

imprisonment in contemporary societies and reveal how new approaches to imprisonment add to and redefine, the pains experienced within such contexts. For Fleury-Steiner and Longazel (2013:7) these pains are largely considered in relation to the prison's role in "impacting historically oppressed groups in ways that above all else oppress them further", an important consideration when thinking about Black mothers' experiences of imprisonment. Equally importantly, Crewe (2011) argues that in contemporary prisons burdens and frustrations are either experienced because of the structure of imprisonment itself, intentional incidences of abuse and neglect, or as a consequence of institutional policies and practices.

Writing specifically about the "pains of racism", Phillips (2012: 173) explores the complex ways in which the "dynamics of race" are perceived and experienced by imprisoned men, with consideration given to both interpersonal interactions and prison regimes (see section 3.3). In loosely drawing upon her framework, this chapter contributes an understanding to some of the racialised pains of imprisonment for Black mothers whilst also acknowledging the diverse and complex nature of such pains. The three intersecting pains explored within this chapter refer to 'The Pains of Marginalisation', 'The Pains of Discrimination' and 'The Pains of Appeasement'. Notably, the naming and recognition of these pains is not to position Black mothers' experiences as being a result of their racialised identities. There is nothing inherent in Black femininity that leads to such pains. Rather, the naming of these pains renders visible institutional Whiteness; which Liu (2017: 558) defines as "(1) a location of structural advantage; (2) a standpoint from which White people look at themselves, others and society; and (3) a set of normalised cultural practices". Rabelo et al (2020: 1843) states, it is through the normalisation and acceptance of institutional Whiteness and the White gaze that "colonialism and institutional racism create enduring harm for marginalised groups".

The importance of emphasising institutional Whiteness within the prison system was prompted during my conversation with Trish who affirmed:

"Because I've got a young Black daughter for me, I've got to change the narrative. It's not because I'm Black because that is [prison staff] saying, or whoever's saying, it's still

and Jahaes 2022; Baldwin 2021; Ocen 2012) the pains of 'cimmigration' as experienced by 'foreign nationals' (see Warr 2016; Ugelvik and Damsa 2018).

my fault. I have no control over the colour of my skin but the way that you think, you have control over that. So, it's not because I'm Black it's because you're ignorant. It's not because I'm Black."

Above, Trish challenges discourses that apportion blame to those experiencing racism rather than the people or processes causing it. This challenge was rooted in a conscious decision to set an example for her daughter who was also navigating the world as a Black, teenage girl. As a Black mother, therefore, Trish not only had to consider her own experiences of racialisation and racism but also the implications that society may have on her daughter's lived experiences which shaped the construction of her narrative. This supports the argument that Black mothers often have to strategically mother in ways that challenge racism and reinforce the value of their children's identities and sense of belonging (see Collins 1987;1994; Erel and Reynolds 2018; Corely and Raheem 2019). In this chapter, I thus explore the ways in which the mothers navigated through the institutionally White middle-classed and masculine processes and expectations of the prison system and the consequences of this for Black motherhood.

Within this chapter, I also engage with the concept of 'community motherwork' (see section 2.5) - or what I term 'Activist Motherwork' (see also Naples 1992) - to describe strategies developed by Black mothers to actively challenge racism and racialised inequities within the prison system. Furthermore, I highlight how strategies of 'Protective Motherwork' can be seen as a direct response to experiences and threats of racism for Black imprisoned mothers, further building upon the typology of imprisoned motherwork introduced in the previous chapter. Throughout the chapter, I also emphasise how these different strategies of 'motherwork' are indicative of processes of 'responsibilisation' that result in Black women having to personally and collectively challenge, resist and mitigate against their own structural oppression within a system characterised by misogynoir (see section 3.5).

6.2 The Pains of Marginalisation

In her writing, Hurston (1928) cited in Rabelo et al (2019:1942) states "I feel most coloured when I am thrown against a sharp White background". Drawing upon this notion, this section analyses elements of the mothers' narratives where emphasis is placed on the White institutional nature of different prisons and the implications of this. Attention is given to how

many of the mothers I spoke with seemed to face a paradoxical form of marginalisation in that they were rendered invisible through the institutional ignorance of their needs as Black women, but they were also, somewhat simultaneously, made hypervisible⁶¹ through the construction of their racialised identities as something *out of place* and at times even *threatening* and *disruptive*. Consideration will also be given to narratives that challenge the notion of the “sharp White background” in acknowledgement of the diversity amongst differing mothers’ experiences and perceptions.

6.2.1 Standing Out

Out of all the mothers I spoke with, Trish narrated her experience of imprisonment in the most racialised terms. She consistently reflected upon her position as a Black woman and often used this lens to make sense of her lived experiences in prison and wider society. In this section, Trish’s experience entering the prison system is described and highlights how Black mothers and their families may come to feel hypervisible within predominately White institutional spaces. Recalling her experience of the reception process into a closed private prison on the outskirts of a city, Trish shared:

“Straight away I was aware that I was Black and that was on my first night in prison... When you go in before they take you to the cell, you’re like in a holding area ... and I was the only Black person amongst all the other women. So, I was like okay. Then every officer that I came in to contact with - from the walking through the door, to the reception point, to the going on to my wing - they were all White. So straight away I just felt - like I say I come from such a multicultural community that little changes like that you automatically notice.”

As she was not used to navigating within predominately White social spaces, the ‘sharp White background’ of the prison shaped Trish’s understanding of her own racialised body and its’ meaning within this new social context, supporting Warr’s (2022) argument that prisons are White institutional spaces that often position and respond to Blackness as type of intrusion. Upon entering the prison, this feeling of difference manifested itself in a heightened awareness of what it *now* meant to be Black beneath the prison’s White institutional gaze:

⁶¹ Racialised invisibility and hypervisibility are terms frequently used within academic literature to describe the experience of being systematically ignored and/or underrepresented whilst also being positioned as particularly vulnerable to increased surveillance and scrutiny (see for example Mowatt et al 2013; Mlotshwa 2018; Settles et al 2019)

“They assumed when I came in there that I was like some gang banger. That I was gonna be here causing them problems and I was getting remarks from officers ... They’d be like ‘Oh yeah I can see why you’d be a problem’ ‘I can see what kind you are’ ... Then I’m thinking to myself the only thing that would make you think this is two things: my colour or my choice of attire...I’m literally in prison-issued clothing so I look like the majority of women out here right now. So, the only other thing for me was my colour because I haven’t done anything else.”

The prison officer’s assumptions that Trish would be a “*problem*” and “*gang banger*” reflect harmful stereotypes that associate Blackness with disruptive and suspicious behaviour (Chigwada-Bailey 2003; Warr 2022); constructions that did not reflect Trish’s own sense of self. The meaning attributed to her racialised identity by staff was therefore responsive to the structuring of space within the institutionally White prison – which coded Blackness with risk (see also Warr 2022), and this challenged her understandings of her own identity. The experience of feeling one’s own racialised body in different ways in relation to the context in which we are situated fits closely with Hurston’s (1928) essay (as cited in Rabelo et al 2019) where she describes how it was only when she began to enter predominately White spaces that she developed a heightened sense of how her body could be racialised and understood as a contrast to Whiteness.

Feelings of hypervisibility were not only experienced by Trish but were also described as being extended to her family during visits. Through highlighting her family’s experiences as being like her own Trish also acted to validate her perceptions:

“We were the only Blacks on the visit and I’m talking out of officers and inmates even my mum - and my mum isn’t one to - my mum was like [leans forwards and whispers] ‘I feel like we’re the spot the Black people family’ [laughs] I was like ‘mum!’ and she was like ‘No, look there’s no Black people’ and then she was like ‘It’s not even that there’s no Black people like there are no people of colour here’.... So, you know, there was a lot of times you know experiencing racism and it being brushed off as though I’m the sensitive one and ‘it’s not that bad’ so yeah really frustrating.”

Not only was Trish a Black mother in prison but her family were visiting the prison as Black and Black-mixed-race people and so also became vulnerable to marginalisation. Feelings of hypervisibility and marginalisation for Trish in the early stages of her sentence appear to be positioned within an interactional process responsive to both being a physically racialised

minority (i.e., being the only Black family in the visits hall) and being minoritised (i.e., being stereotyped by officers). The way in which meanings of Blackness change in different contexts is supported by Yancy (2008:845) who argues that space is “historically structured”, and it is through this structuring of space in predominantly White spaces where Black people become stereotyped, “judged” and thus marginalised. However, not all Black mothers experienced feelings of marginalisation in the same way as Trish.

Describing her experience in an inner-city public sector prison whilst being held on remand for six months Chante noted:

“There was a lot of Black officers. A lot of them...there was more Black officers than I had Black teachers at school.”

It is therefore important to recognise the presence of Black staff within prisons. Reflecting on her experiences as a Black woman working within the educational department across four prisons, Marcia Morgan (2019, para 3) highlights how most academic and occupational literature surrounding racialisation and imprisonment commonly “portray an axiomatic prison employee: White men”. Whilst this was the case in most of the mothers’ narratives, with prison officers and prison staff often being discussed as being White or not Black, Chante’s recollection of her interactions with Black prison officers highlights a different type of marginalisation that would have otherwise gone unrecognised:

“Funny enough all of my problems were with the Black officers and all of my support came from the White ones...I think sometimes when [they] see [their] own people there and [they] see what they’re there for - it’s like disappointment.”

As explored in section 3.10, Black mothers post-release may experience racialised marginalisation from their own communities (Willingham 2011) and Black probation staff (Baldwin 2021). Chante’s experience demonstrates how these experiences may manifest during imprisonment. Chante felt as though her interactions with Black officers had been underpinned by their racialised sense of shame surrounding her imprisonment, a feeling she did not get from interactions with White officers. Racialised marginalisation must therefore also be understood in relation to cultural, classed prejudices and internalized racisms which

shape how Black people view, treat and respond to one another as well as themselves. In the following subsection I focus more closely on marginalisation resulting from a lack of access to material goods.

6.2.2 “I Couldn’t Even Comb My Hair”

The sharp White background of particular prison environments was also apparent through the narratives of Kayla, Trish and Sharon relating to the availability of appropriate hair and beauty products for Black women in prison. The lack of appropriate products for people racialised as non-White appears to be an ongoing issue, as over 16 years ago, Cheliotis and Leibling (2006: 294) argued that the “unavailability of specialist products at the prison canteen⁶²” demonstrated one of the ways in which racism manifested itself in “the control and access... to prison facilities and activities” (see also Cardale et al 2017). Describing her experience in a closed private prison, Trish recalled:

“There’s some brushes they look really nice and I can see by your curly hair you wouldn’t be able to use it! It is just going to rip your hair out - it is for straight Caucasian hair. They were the only brushes you could buy and literally you had the whole of the ethnic community saying look these brushes are not suitable... I remember literally that there was no products that I was able to use for my skin. They literally only had like Johnson’s pink baby lotion, that’s not something really that I can use. I need something a bit heavier maybe some coconut oil [laughs] or whatever um it’s just little things like that. So, when I was there that’s what I found, things like that reminded me I’m Black.”

Trish’s experience directly links back to Hurston’s (1928 as cited in Rabelo et al 2019: 1842) acknowledgment that Black women often feel a heightened sense of their racialised identity when navigating within predominately White social spaces as this is when we come to learn, by “being thrown against a sharp White background”, that our ways of doing and being outside of such contexts are no longer recognised as the norm. For Trish and other Black women, including myself as she points out in the extract above, products for our skin and hair are not seen as specialist or niche. They are our ordinary. That is until we enter spaces where they become hard to obtain and are not recognised as essential or standard.

⁶²‘Canteen’ refers to any products people can purchase whilst imprisoned.

During our post-interview conversation, Sharon also shared the difficulty she had faced within a closed prison with accessing suitable hair and beauty products [Research Notes]. This is reflective of Sykes (1958) argument that the prison causes pain through the deprivation of *appropriate* 'goods and services'. Sharon highlighted how she was not able to access hair grease, cocoa butter, make-up that matched her skin colour, or braiding hair; all things she found important not only for preventing damage to her skin and hair but also her sense of identity. Because Sharon experienced alopecia she also found having access to braiding hair particularly important for retaining her confidence and was happy that Greenhill permitted such products and hairstyles.

Banks (2000) and Thompson (2009) argue that hair is often an intrinsic part of Black women's identities as hair practices are interwoven with political, cultural, classed, gendered and racialised expectations of being. Dominant beauty paradigms in Britain often favour White, Eurocentric hair textures and so Black women often face increased pressure to alter their natural hair (Thompson 2009). Many natural Black hair practices and styles also require certain products to prevent damage. Within some prison environments, therefore, the inaccessibility of products suitable for Black hair may result in an additional layer of identity loss for Black mothers who may find it more difficult to present as themselves whilst imprisoned, which also has consequences for self presentation during visits with children and family (see also Goddard 2018).

Kayla, Trish, and Sharon all described advocating for the canteen to stock more appropriate hair and beauty products, demonstrating how Black women engage in acts of resistance to challenge racialised inequalities and create spaces for themselves and others (see also Collins 1990). The mothers utilised different avenues of resistance such as verbal complaints to members of staff (Kayla), written complaints to the prison sent by family members (Trish), engaging in focus groups hosted by the prison (Sharon) and arguably taking part in an interview with me. Aliyah, a Black 25-year-old woman, cited in Goddard's (2018) magazine article also recalled petitioning with other women in prison for access to Black hair products. For Kayla, Sharon and Aliyah, (cited in Goddard 2018), these avenues were seen to have resulted in the inclusion of catalogues that stocked products suitable for their hair and skin as explained by Kayla in our interaction below:

Kayla: In [Closed public sector prison] they didn't have nothing on the canteen for us and my hair was falling out and it was dry. I was like 'Look can I have my stuff sent in cuz look at my hair?' Then I had to go to Mr Riggs.

Monica: So not enough Black hair products?

Kayla: No! literally they had, you know that palm olive stuff? We don't even use that stuff for our hair do you know what I mean? I know palm olive for my skin - I don't know 'bout no palm olive for my hair and they didn't have no hair grease. They had some dark and lovely moisturiser thing, like my hair's a bit more more coarse - just a little bit more coarse than yours. So, you know when our hair dry out, it dry out. So, um I had to get on to them about that. So, they came up with that Pak [Cosmetics] stuff, so I was quite happy about that.

The above quote reveals the way in which Black women are often rendered invisible beneath White institutional norms until they specifically ask and demand to be recognised and included. The mothers' experiences discussed within this section emphasise how the prison system does not proactively think about Black women's need but rather may react when prompted. The labour associated with addressing racialised disparities therefore remains the responsibility and burden of Black women, linking back in with Collin's (1990; 1994) concept of what I term 'Activist motherwork' (see also Naples 1992) and the wider processes of 'responsibilisation' (O'Malley 2009) that I argue underpins such *work* for Black mothers. In the next subsection, I detail Trish's experience of being excluded and ignored by staff, demonstrating how the system does not always listen and respond to the perspectives of Black women.

6.2.3 Black History Month

Trish also expressed feeling marginalised during the build-up to and celebration of Black History Month within a closed public sector prison which she recalled being predominately by prison officers despite many of the "30" Black women imprisoned, including herself, wanting to be involved. Exploring this narrative of erasure illustrates another way that self-hood and identity can be controlled, restricted and denied at an institutional level:

"They [the prison officers] done their own thing ... and then the term was basically I should be happy that it's been recognised. It's been marked. Black history was marked. And I was like no because Black history, hi-st-or-y is history. There's more to it, it's not just slavery. It's loads and loads. There were stories before slavery. There's been stories

since slavery... There are so many ways in which you can mark Black history without it being about slavery cuz I'm not being funny ... before any of you lot [the prison] told me about slavery my mum was already giving me history lessons ... So, she's like you know when you're taught history and they're just telling you about slavery always ask, 'So when slavery was happening that's the only thing that was happening in the world, is that it?' And she's always said that to me. So, I said that and it was just like basically how dare I [points at chest] not appreciate what they've done."

Black History Month was therefore important to Trish as it was seen as an opportunity to “mark” elements of history that had often been erased from common narratives surrounding Black identities and experiences. As conversations about Black history had played a key part in Trish’s experience of being mothered, such discussions were deeply imbedded in her sense of identity. This supports Reynolds’ (2020:3) argument that Black mothering often encapsulates acts of “nurture” which consciously challenge the racialised marginalisation of Black children. However, the prison’s approach to Black History Month, which centred slavery and de-centred Black imprisoned women’s ideas, led to Trish feeling marginalised and ignored. Not only was she prevented from taking part in the organisation of Black history month, but she was also expected to “appreciate” and be “happy” with the event just because it had taken place.

The paradoxical effect of Black History Month is that when organised insensitively it further oppresses Black women - and even then, they are still expected to be grateful. The way in which certain approaches to intellectualising ‘Black history’ silence, hide and forget certain narratives has also been recognised by Adebisi (2021: para 12) who notes: “If Black History Month is to mean anything beyond a shallow celebration of culture and decontextualised ahistorical accounts of Blackness... African and African descended peoples must be given the space to write ourselves into the light”. When Trish speaks about Black history with possessive determinators, such “my history”, she highlights her perception that narratives of Black history should belong to her, as a Black woman. Re-claiming her history and telling stories where Black people had “freedom” and agency was therefore important for Trish whose sense of power over her own narrative and identity had been repeatedly challenged within the restrictive institution of the prison. I now move on to detailing the connection between open conditions and feelings of racialised marginalisation, in recognition that different prison conditions pose different challenges.

6.2.4 White Spaces and Open Conditions

Open prison conditions were described by many of the mothers who had experienced them, as enabling more productive mothering relationships (Baldwin 2020; See also section 5.4). However, although open conditions were seen as *somewhat* emancipating in relation to positive mothering identities, personal self-esteem and autonomy; they were simultaneously associated with a heightened risk of racial marginalisation due to their rural geographical locations and staff demographics (Donna; Kayla; Linda; Malika; Trish). In keeping with existing literature (Shammus 2014; Statham et al 2020) and the findings explored in section 5.4, therefore, open conditions partly relieve some pains of imprisonment, but they also create or exacerbate existing pains such as racism.

In her research Baldwin (2018:53) found that mothers often “differentiated between prisons, describing how they were responded to very definitely from place to place, and identifying interesting variables (worthy of further research) such as location-specific cultures and atmospheres”. However, focusing more closely on race, the mothers I spoke with often positioned this differentiation as being racialised. Talking through her experience across several prisons Trish recalled inner-city prisons as having more “*Black*” and “*Asian*” officers “*because of where [they were] situated*” whereas open prisons “[*did*] *not have any Black officers*”. The geographical location in which a prison was situated was therefore felt to have an impact on its’ culture. Carroll (2004) argues that prisons mimic the cultural and racial demographics and dynamics at play in the local area in which they are positioned as people are recruited from surrounding areas and bring with them their norms, values and lived experiences. Recounting her previous experience in (what was then classified as) “semi-open” conditions Kayla recalled:

“When I went to [Semi-open prison] they didn’t know how to take me cuz it’s up North. There was like a group of us from [Inner-city area] and they’re saying we’re bringing city gangster antics and we’re like ‘What do you mean we’re bringing gangster antics?’ Like up North don’t have gangsters? Like what are we doing? So, I found [it] quite racist.”

The quote above demonstrates how Kayla felt marginalised whilst in semi-open conditions due to stereotypical views held by staff, in relation to both her geographical and racialised backgrounds, that positioned her perceived ‘urban-ness’ and ‘Blackness’ as disruptive, more

criminal, *other* and deeply embedded within gang culture. Further reflecting on her experience Kayla stated:

Kayla: I would never go back; the set-up is lovely like, it's great. You got loads of freedom and everything but the officers, they're not used to Black people up there I'm telling you.

Monica: It's quite in like an isolated location, in the countryside.

Kayla: Fields!

Consequently, there is a paradoxical tension between the heightened sense of physical freedom that is seen to define open conditions and the added weight of racialised marginalisation which re-restricts the *partially* freed self. Linda, who had experienced imprisonment over twenty-years-ago, also described feeling as though open conditions were largely coded as White institutional spaces because of their geographical locations and the local people they employed:

"The further out you go it's just all, mostly White officers you know. And when they go home and push their key, they don't see another Black person until they come back to work. So, they can't really re-e-e-l-a-te [Linda's emphasis] to you. They relate from the media [laughs]. You know what I mean."

For women such as Linda who are not used to navigating within predominately rural areas, therefore, imprisonment within such locations may act as an additional and unique burden as marginalisation is experienced not only in relation to the prison environment but also within the locality in which it is situated (see also Carroll 2004). The feeling of being *othered* within rural or countryside settings is also explored by Cloke (2004: 18) who argues that in Britain "difference, suspicion, marginalisation and racism" often characterise the experiences of Black people in countryside settings. It is important to note here, that rurality is not synonymous with Whiteness. There is nothing intrinsic to the countryside that lends itself to being a predominately White space (Parker 2019). However, in Britain, rural locations have largely become "imagined as White environments" and consequently people racialised as 'Non-White' have become vulnerable to feelings of marginalisation and experiences of harm in such spaces (Parker 2020: para 1).

The mothers I spoke with at Greenhill also shared similar narratives of marginalisation to Linda implying little had changed in the past 20 years and during my time there, prior to even speaking with the mothers, I was given the impression that I had entered a predominately White institution as also experienced through a heightened sense of my own racialised identity within this space. In my research notes, I jotted down the following comment from a staff member: *'It's largely White middle-class women who have committed fraud or lifers who are at the end of their sentence [who are housed here]'* and all of the staff members I encountered were also White. Discussing her experience of currently being imprisoned within Greenhill Malika shared:

"When I came here it took a long time to process everything in terms of paperwork you name it. Even to get out – it just seems like if you know how to speak their jargon or get along with them or stuff like that. To be honest me coming in an environment like this it's not my type of forte. It's not people that I would normally associate with. So, it's like if you know how to talk to these people, you'll get places."

For Malika, feeling as though she did not have the linguistic and cultural capital to navigate and communicate with staff, within this predominately White and middle-classed institutional space resulted in her feeling marginalised and out of place. The environment was culturally unfamiliar, and this seemed to position her as peripheral to the linguistic discourses and processes within it (Fanon 1952). Drawing upon the works of Bourdieu (1977; 1985; 2000;) and Wallace (2019), Wilson (2021b) highlights how in relation to racialised and classed identities people experience cultural capital differently depending on their immediate environments or fields. Wilson (2021b: 37) defines *fields* "as spaces of struggle, where people compete for resources and dominance". However, having access to cultural capital which matches the field being inhabited enables greater progression and acceptance within that social space (Bourdieu 1977; Wilson 2021b). In relation to the *field* of Greenhill Malika's acknowledgment that it was not her "type of forte" demonstrates how exposure to new fields with different norms, values and expectations can be unsettling and challenging.

Unlike Malika, Donna described feeling a greater sense of familiarity with the cultural and geographical White and middle-classed environment or *field* that appeared to define open prison conditions. Whilst expressing how she felt some of the other Black women in open

conditions “segregated” themselves to “feel safe”, Donna contrasted this with her understanding of her own experience:

“I’m actually from [similar location] so I’m used to manoeuvring round and being maybe the minority. I’m used to that yeah. But a lot of people are not used to - and in this environment is not natural to where a lot of people have come from. We don’t even have Black staff.”

Donna believed she found it easier to navigate within the environment of Greenhill as “manoeuvring” in the margins was something she was used to doing on the outside in her everyday life. This was further reflected in the relationship I observed between herself and Charlie, the staff member facilitating the research, where there was a sense of similarity in the way they spoke and an ease or familiarity in the way they interacted with one another. It is interesting that Donna’s way of “manoeuvring” within such spaces, in and out of prison, both depended on accepting and understanding herself as marginal, a feeling she associated with her Mixed-race identity:

“I do tend to just sit on the edge and I don’t belong in groups and I think that sometimes that’s to do with being mixed-race. I don’t actually feel like I belong to a particular group. And then other times I’m quite happy ... and you’ll have a mixed-race girl they’ve got completely different experience to me because maybe the way I talk, maybe the way I’ve been brought up um - I’ve you know certain comments. I’ve been told you know ‘You’re a half breed’. So, um with that they’d let me know I’m not one of them... Definitely not one of them. Do you get me? I’m not in the Black. And I’m like ‘Oh okay I thought that was up to me to decide, I didn’t know people decided – didn’t know you decide that for me’ [chuckles].”

Donna seemingly accepted her marginal position in relation to being Mixed-race within a predominately White institutional space. However, her feelings of marginalisation appeared to be heightened through her perceived rejection from a particular group of Black women who she felt viewed her as a “half-breed” and not Black enough.

Donna acknowledged how some Mixed-race women had not faced rejection like she had, as they “talk[ed]” and acted in particular ways which better aligned with the groups perceived understanding of a Black identity. This links back to the notion of cultural capital as the intersection of both Donna’s racialised and classed identities prevented her from being able to

embody what she understood to be this particular groups cultural definition of Blackness (see Wilson 2021b). This also reinforces Campion's (2019: 197) argument that "Mixed-race experiences of rejection can often come about because they are perceived as unable to fit into discrete, monolithic racial and ethnic categories". Donna was therefore experiencing a binary form of marginality in that she saw herself as being not only marginal to Whiteness but also Blackness and as a result felt she had to "*sit on the edge*". In the next section, I explore the different ways in which racism and discrimination were described as impacting on the mothers' experiences of imprisonment as well as their 'progression' through the prison system towards release.

6.3 The Pains of Discrimination

This section focuses on the complex and different ways in which the mothers interviewed interpreted and named racial discrimination during imprisonment, with emphasis placed on their understandings of the "dynamics of race" within this context (Phillips 2012:173). Many of the mothers described experiencing racial discrimination and felt it was engrained within the everyday processes of the prison system and so were largely "*subtle*" (Trish). Although it is important to acknowledge that some mothers did experience more '*explicit*' forms of discrimination such as racialised harassment from other women in prison and staff, the following subsection specifically focuses on the ways in which mothers felt more "*subtle*" types of discriminatory treatment were manifested and maintained, through everyday interactions with staff and processes of imprisonment. The final subsection then explores narratives from mothers who did not perceive racial discrimination to influence or shape their experience of imprisonment, challenging the notion that Black mothers' experiences are one-dimensional and monolithic.

6.3.1 "*The Subtleties of Racism*"

For many of the mothers who described experiencing racial discrimination, such experiences were largely reflective of more "*subtle*" (Trish) racisms (Joy; Linda; Malika; Sharon; Trish). Here "*subtle*" racism refers to forms of racial discrimination which often get away with being excused and downplayed due to their veiled nature (see Reynolds 2005; Coates 2011). As racial discrimination is often not taken seriously (unless it can be evidenced in a way considered *valid*

by those in authority) it becomes difficult to challenge more covert forms which are hard to describe and almost always impossible to 'prove', as expressed by Trish: *"It's the subtleties of racism which people don't realise yeah, they cut a lot deeper than you being openly racist"*. Describing her experience of being prevented from taking part in a youth mentoring scheme despite having relevant qualifications, work-experience and lived-experience, Trish explained:

"Even now when I think about it, I'm like I would love to do it. I would love to be involved in things like that. So, I was speaking to the woman who was like the facilitator... and I was saying to her you know [I have relevant qualifications], in my community I was community leader... just telling her everything and she was like 'You have all of those?' and I was like 'Yeah'. She was like 'I would really like you to come and be one of the mentors down with us', so I was like [pulls taken aback face]. I was like 'Sure - I would love to do that'. And she was like 'Put in a general app and when it gets through to me, I will approve it straight away'. My OM [Offender Manager] ...she refused me to do it. When we asked why she said she doesn't think it's suitable."

Trish understood this rejection as being racialised as she compared her experience of rejection to that of her Black-mixed-race friend who had been accepted. Trish described her friend as having *"very very fair skin"* and felt that her face had better *"fit"* with what the OM was looking for:

"I am a young Black girl, who has a young Black daughter, comes from one of the most deprived - well known deprived areas who's qualified in these areas ... And my friend [smiles] she's never done it before. Never [done anything similar]. Left school has no qualifications - she just wanted to do it to kill time. She put in and the same person that said no to me put her on the course."

Colourism is a term used to describe discrimination based on skin-tone which sees people with lighter skin often being favoured over people with darker skin due to their perceived differing proximities to Whiteness (Walker 1983; Wilson 2021b). Comparing her experiences as a dark-skinned Black woman to that of a light-skinned Black-Mixed-race woman and seeing different consequences influenced Trish's interpretation of the situation as being influenced by skin colour. Trish's description of her friend as being less qualified for the course further stressed her feelings of unjustness and hurt. Not only did she feel wronged for not getting on the course

and being prevented from taking part in the community motherwork⁶³ she highly valued and closely associated with her racialised and classed identity, but someone less qualified had been accepted due to what she understood as a preference for the colour of their skin. For Trish this experience was constructed as cutting “*deeper*” as it was subtly concealed beneath and enabled by, processes and discretionary practices upheld by the wider institution. The pains of discrimination were also discussed in relation to a difficulty in ‘progressing’ through system towards open conditions and eventual release, as explored in the next subsection.

6.3.2 Stretched and Sticky Time

The way in which racialised discriminatory treatment was felt to be woven within the very fabric of the prison’s estate, was also revealed in some of the mothers ‘Stretched’ feelings of time. Joy, Linda, Malika and Sharon described their ‘progression’ through the prison system as being hindered by “*long*” discriminatory delays and barriers that prevented them from being able to advance quickly through the prison Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) scheme, move to open conditions and access ROTL, including CRL. For Black mothers, therefore, the texture of prison time may not only be ‘Stretched’ by the disproportionate likelihood of receiving a long custodial sentence (see also Martinez et al 2020) but also through discretionary practices at play within the prison system that result in Black women having “*to wait a lot longer*” than White women to ‘progress’ through (Linda). I thus argue that what feminist abolitionist Davis (2003b:360) describes as “*racialised punishment*” is not only evident in the disparate custodial sentencing rates of Black mothers in England and Wales but also in their experiences of discriminatory treatment within the prison system itself.

The ‘Stretched’ texture of time is reflected in the following two observations from Linda:

“Being transferred you know. You’ll wait a lot longer. It depends on, it’s hard to really explain but, but being Black and being White there’s a lot of differences in prison.”

“It took me two years to get enhanced because the SO [Senior Officer] didn’t like me... she held me back for as long as she could, they’ve got the power init... They play a lot of games in prison.”

⁶³ ‘Community motherwork’, as explored in section 2.5, relates to the work that “Black women are doing for the collective community [which are all] ... forms of mothering” such as in this example mentoring and youth work (see Corley and Raheem 2019:5 and Reynolds 2005; 2020; Reynolds and Erol 2018).

Linda found it “*hard to explain*” the discrimination she faced, again reinforcing this sense that such experiences were ‘*subtle*’ and perhaps defined by a feeling in the moment that is then hard to articulate. However, it is vital to recognise these “*hard to explain*” feelings of prejudice and discrimination as it is through these indescribable moments that the pervasive weight of racism is revealed. Through this admission in her narrative, Linda’s difficulty to define her experience thus provides an insight into the struggle that Black women may face when having to name, explain and prove that what they are experiencing is racism within a society that often only validates, understands and believes more ‘explicit’ forms of racism as being real.

Sharon also shared this feeling of time being ‘Stretched’, which she attributed to her current ‘progression’ in open conditions being dependent on the discretion of staff:

“They’re not helpful. There’s a couple of times - and these are things they are supposed to do like with your ROTL form they have to sign it. Sometimes I’ll go to them to get it signed and they’ll job me off. I’ll knock the door of the office, they’ll see me there, they’ll look me right in my face and turn their face away. But make somebody else [mouths the words White] go to the door and they’ll say come in! Yeah and I’ve stood there and I’ve seen this with my own eyes. Sometimes it’s just the tone that they use... and it’s things like that which makes me don’t want to interact with them. I could just say they’re just rude. Yeah rude. And sometimes I think why did they take on a job like this if they’re not willing to help all of the women in prison. You can’t pick and choose who you wanna help or assist.”

It is through the comparison of her own experiences with the more positive interactions she observed between White women and the same staff – framed within Smith et al’s (2015:871) work as “White favouritism” - that Sharon came to understand her experiences as racialised. Like Linda, Sharon also described her understandings of discrimination as a sensory feeling that enabled her to read the situation as an interaction underpinned by racism. There was nothing that has been said that had been ‘undeniably’ racist, but the racism was felt in what was not said. It was felt in the silence, the “*tone*” of voice, the “*turn*” away of the head and the warmth given to somebody else. This links back to acknowledging how “*subtle*” (Trish) types of racism can often be excused, overlooked and downplayed but, have a huge felt impact on the mother’s lives. As, in Sharon’s case not having her forms signed on time could prevent her from being able to spend time with her children in the community, further restricting access to her mothering identity.

In HM Inspectorate of Prisons' (2020) *'Minority ethnic prisoners' experiences of rehabilitation and release planning'* report, processes surrounding immigration status were also recognised as a "serious hindrance to progression" for women racialised as 'foreign nationals' (HM Inspectorate of Prisons 2020: 34). The inherently racist, classist and discriminatory nature of immigration processes which position certain groups as *'other'*, *'alien'* and less-or-unworthy of state care, as maintained through constructions of "legal borders of citizenship", have been argued to act as an additional burden for those in the prison system who are racialised not only as 'non-White' but also as 'non-British' (Noronha 2020:24). Some experiences, therefore, sit at the intersection of both the Criminal Justice and Immigration systems. To explore this further, the remainder of this section highlights the experiences of Joy, a mother from West Africa who, at the time of her imprisonment, was not constructed as a British citizen and the restrictions this placed on her 'progression' through the prison system.

In our conversation, Joy described her experience of not being able to 'progress' to open conditions, regularly access ROTL (including CRL) or qualify for early release which she understood was due to her being labelled as a *"foreigner"* and *"not British"*. The texture of time was not only *'Stretched'* but also somewhat *'Sticky'*. Here, sticky refers to the feeling of restricted movement. Joy was unable to move and 'progress' through the system and stayed stuck in the same prison, in closed conditions, until her release when she was moved to a detention centre. Reflecting on not being able to access CRL to see her son, to whom she had given birth whilst in prison, Joy stated:

"All of the ladies that I was meeting - some of them who got even more years than I had -they were literally out on every weekend and we were on the same landing. There were mothers who had their babies after me they were going out on visits; you know there were some who had children older as old as fifteen years they were giving them time to go with them... on his second birthday there was nothing to celebrate, nothing."

Watching other women temporarily leave the prison to visit their children heightened Joy's pain as it was a constant reminder of what she was missing out on. However, this feeling was even more exacerbated when her ex-husband was transferred to an open prison and began regularly spending time with their son in the community through *"home visits"*:

“So, you know how you progress from [closed to open conditions]? He managed to get there but I was in one [closed] prison for my three and a half years. So even though my category was changing it was not reflecting on the allowance I should get. He found it easy... I applied and applied for the three and a half years. Only once I had a visit with an officer out and she came with me. She stayed with me as I saw [my son], [he] was already walking at the time. Just the once. But my ex was like, every weekend he was coming, every weekend he would apply... I was enhanced status everything but for some reason they decided they wouldn't let me out so what can I do? I just got what I was given really literally nothing ... So really, he enjoyed everything. Even though I worked so hard I never had a problem, never had – I got all the privileges you know when you are enhanced privileges. I asked so many times, I applied they wouldn't let me out to see my child... I remember telling them 'But my ex goes out and comes in' but they said, 'That's men's prisons' - but I don't know why they would be so flexible with a man and not with me?”

Joy's narrative portrays her experience as drastically different to her ex-husband, illuminating the role of gender within discriminatory treatment. Both Joy and her ex-husband were from the same racialised and cultural background, they had both been categorised as “foreigners” and been convicted of the same offence and yet her ex-husband ‘progressed’ to open conditions and Joy remained stuck in closed conditions and separated from her child. Despite asking staff why this had been the case, Joy had not received an informed response, heightening feelings of powerlessness. Experiencing such unjust treatment whilst engaging with the system by providing penal labour, left Joy feeling exploited:

“I felt that I was giving or doing more service to them do you understand? And they were pretty much after what I was giving them, working for them [sniffs] - using me basically”

According to the Parole Board (2020: 12) people racialised as ‘foreign nationals’ can be excluded from accessing ROTL if they have exhausted their right to appeal deportation and are in closed conditions. For people who have not exhausted their right to appeal ROTL is “considered on an individual basis” and based on the perceived risk of abscondment (Parole Board 2020: 13). It is stated also that “people liable for deportation must be subject to a more rigorous risk assessment” before accessing open conditions, with consideration given to potential risks of abscondment and “the possible benefits of resettlement for a prisoner unlikely to be released in the UK” who “will be unable to access public funds and undertake paid or unpaid employment and most forms of study” (Parole Board 2020:12).

Joy had not exhausted her right to appeal and so it appears that her case was considered on an individual basis, where it had been decided that she was either a high risk of absconding or that resettlement was not important in her case. Whilst racialised as a ‘foreign national’, Joy’s mothering identity was therefore rendered insignificant by the prison system in contrast to her ex-husband’s fathering identity. Reunification with her child through ROTL or open conditions was deemed insignificant as she was not valued as someone who would eventually re-enter wider British society. Joy was literally othered – treated as a problem for another country post-release, demonstrating the racist ideologies which construct certain people as more deserving than others and underpin the processes that exist at the intersections of the Criminal Justice and Immigration systems. The construction of Joy’s racialised and gendered identities as well as her immigration status thus shaped the texture of time in relation to her imprisonment. However, processes of racialisation and racism were not universally described by the mothers as impacting upon their experiences of *time* in the prison system, which I consider further in the next subsection.

6.3.3 “It’s Actually Not Bad”

Not all the mothers perceived their experiences of imprisonment to be heavily, or at all, influenced by racial discrimination (Annette; Chante). This finding is reflective of Phillips’ (2011) research with men in prison that also revealed differing perceptions surrounding the presence of racism including denials of its prevalence (see section 3.3). It is therefore not the case that the pains of imprisonment will be felt as racialised for all Black mothers in prisons. When asked about her experiences of being Black whilst imprisoned Chante explained: *“I would say racism was the furthest thing from my mind. I don’t feel like they discriminated”*. As highlighted previously (see subsection 6.2.1), Chante had spent six months on remand in closed conditions within an inner-city prison that she described as having more Black prison officers than she had teachers at school. Chante was also pregnant during her time on remand. The context of her imprisonment may have therefore prevented her from experiencing racial discrimination in the same way that many of the other mothers did.

Importantly, it was not the case that Chante did not interpret any of her lived experiences in racialised terms. We briefly discussed how racism in the healthcare system leads to Black

mothers being treated unfairly during pregnancy and childbirth and she also expressed how racism had been present during her sentencing, as did Malika, highlighting the racialised experience of the criminal courts and the racialisation of punishment (see Davis 2003b; Monteith et al 2022):

"[On sentencing] Naively I did expect to go home but my solicitor explained [the severity of the charges] ... but obviously for me, what my mum said, the person who came before me stabbed someone in the street [a different offence] and got bail and also, they were White."

Therefore, there was something about the context of Chante's imprisonment that did not warrant the racialised lens she applied to other situations. Although Chante did not perceive racial discrimination to be present during her imprisonment, she did experience "problems" with Black officers who she felt saw her as a "disappointment" (see subsection 6.2.1). Perhaps therefore, as racial discrimination has often been thought of in terms of an interracial interaction Chante may not have defined her harmful intraracial interactions with Black officers as coming under this specific heading of racial discrimination within her narrative.

Like Chante, Annette also felt her racialised identity was not salient during her experience of imprisonment although she acknowledged that other women in prison may not feel the same:

"I don't think I've been treated any different. I know other women have had difficult experiences and they may put it down to race, but I think once you've got a good mannerism with all the officers, they will just treat you - they treat you - us all individually. And I think I've been treated quite well since months into my sentence I've been brought to an open prison so good behaviour does pay off. As long as you're not rude to them and you just get on and do your sentence, you're not a difficult person - it's actually not bad."

Highlighting how quickly she was able to 'progress' to open conditions was Annette's way of evidencing the absence of racial discrimination within the prison system, a direct contrast to mothers' narratives highlighted in the previous subsection (6.3.2).

By focusing on individual behaviour, such as "good mannerisms" and not being "rude" to staff, Annette revealed her approach to survival within an institution that necessitated compliance with its' norms and values. However, it is important to question the racialised meaning of what

may constitute ‘good’ behaviour in regard to the institutionally White standards and expectations of the prison, as discussed in section 6.4. Annette’s approach, which placed responsibility on the individual and rather than the institution, also provided her with a greater sense of control and assurance in relation to her own ‘progression’. Establishing positive relationships with staff can therefore be seen as an essential strategy that enabled her “*to get on and [do] her sentence*” with slightly more ease and protection. This is supported by Scraton and Carlton (2017:190) who argue that “within prison regimes, compliance becomes the only test of prisoners’ ‘progress’ towards release, determining the specific conditions and daily routines imposed”.

Annette was not the only mother involved in this research who felt she needed to appease the prison system to enable ‘progression’ and ensure survival, in keeping with the wider prisons literature (see Crewe 2011; Scraton and Carlton 2017). However, for the majority of the other mothers interviewed, approaches to appeasement were often explicitly constructed as responsive to the immediate institutional threat of racism and misogyny, as detailed in the next section.

6.4 The Pains of Appeasement

Many of the mothers I spoke with felt a responsibility to engage in self-censorship, self-policing and institutional compliance while imprisoned to mitigate against the possibility of more punitive treatment and more easily “progress” through the system (see also Crewe 2011; Warr 2022) and reunite with their children. This supports Collins’ (1990) observation that Black women must often develop strategies of survival within societies underpinned by racism, further evidencing the racialised and gendered processes of ‘responsibilisation’ that render Black mothers personally responsible for protecting themselves, their families and communities in the absence of protection by the state (see section 2.7.2). Institutional compliance thus provides another example of the ‘Protective Motherwork’ utilised by the mothers to minimise the likelihood of further and heightened state intervention, thus protecting themselves and their children from further harm. In this section, consideration is given to how these appeasements - underpinned by institutional processes of racialisation - were illustrated through the mother’s narratives and how they came to be embodied in the

moment of narrative production itself. Note, the strategies the mothers used for appeasement sometimes overlapped and intersected and so are not presented in chronological order.

6.4.1 Keeping Your Head Down

For many mothers, an emphasis was placed on *getting on* with their custodial sentence in a way that drew little attention to themselves so that they could more easily exist within and, ‘progress’ through, the prison system (Annette, Donna, Joy, Kayla, Malika, Sharon, Trish). Recounting her journey through imprisonment Sharon summarised:

“The first one [a closed public sector prison] was horrible. Really horrible. A lot of bang-up behind your door... So, I got a job on the wing. So, I was out when a lot of girls were behind their door, that helped me a lot. Then once I got my sentence, then I went to - even though it’s classed as closed its like semi-open. You get more freedom. Yeah, you get locked in at a quarter to eight, but my plan was to get to the open wing. The resettlement wing they call it. So, once I got my enhancement you just do what you need to do. I’m grown so I aint causing no problems, I aint got time for that I just wanna get my head down do the time and get out and sort my family out.”

Sharon thus had a strategic “*plan*” to reunite with her family in the community, with emphasis placed throughout our conversation on resuming the care of her teenage son who she felt had been “*affected the most*” by her imprisonment. However, as a Black mother, she saw racism from staff as a possible threat to her ‘progression’:

“In one of the prisons I was in it was very racist. But me, as a mature woman I don’t interact with them. I try my best not to because I don’t want – because I don’t know what my reaction will be, so I try not to interact too much. I go to them when I need something done and that’s it.”

Sharon understood racism as something inevitable that had to be hidden from and avoided to prevent or minimise its impact. Navigating the prison system whilst Black, for some mothers, was therefore underpinned by an expectation of discriminatory treatment and this perception impacted the way they were then able to move around and exist within particular prison environments. These findings mirror Wilson and Moore’s (2003) research with young, imprisoned men, who did not identify as White and found that ‘Keeping Quiet’ was one of the common strategies for coping with imprisonment. Similarly, to the notion of ‘Keeping Your Head Down’, ‘Keeping quiet’ was identified by Wilson and Moore (2003) as the way in which

the young men actively complied with the institution to make their time easier and this therefore appears to be a common strategy utilised by people exposed to the threat of discrimination (see also Warr 2022).

Like Sharon, Trish also felt the need to 'Keep her head down' was a *protective* strategy directly associated with her mothering identity as reflected in the following quote:

"I knew that when I went in there, as a mum, I don't have time to waste. So, I'm going to be using this time wisely. I'm not gonna be getting caught up in the prison politics and dramas because I've got a real-life outside and so I decided I would keep myself to myself."

However, the preventative strategy of Keeping Your Head Down was not always effective as it was sometimes met with suspicion from staff, as Malika explained: *"if you keep yourself to yourself – oh that's a problem"*. A similar reaction was also observed by Trish:

"But prison officers turned that around and used it against me and said that I was unsociable, that I think I'm better than everybody else [laughs]. And I'm like no I don't think I'm better than any of these people ... I'd say to them 'At the end of the day I've had to come in here and prove myself more than anyone just because I'm Black' [scoffs and mimics voice] 'Oh no no that's not the - [snaps] 'No but it is!'. It is the case. I've had to prove myself. I've had to prove that I'm not a troublemaker - even though I never caused any trouble with anybody."

Importantly, Trish's understanding that she had to *"work ten times harder"* as a Black woman to *"prove"* herself was something her mum had *"taught"* her *"from early"* and so this feeling was not unique to the context of imprisonment but something she had also been made aware of in the outside world. In her writing, Phillips (2012: 203-204) highlights the how this *"racialised status quo"* is experienced *"inside and outside the prison walls"* and argues that the pains of racism define all aspects of postcolonial society. However, I believe it is important to go further here and to argue that whilst the burden of racism is often carried both inside and outside of the prison, experiences of racism and misogynoir within the prison walls are often compounded by their permissible nature in that the prison as an institution is built on state-sanctioned violence. The racism Trish experienced in prison was therefore still *"shocking"*.

Some of the mothers such as Malika and Kayla found it difficult at first to understand the prison system and how it functioned. Reflecting upon her first time in prison, within a closed public sector prison, Kayla described:

“When I first went there, I was wild. I didn’t know how to take prison. The officers were shouting at my friend, so I was shouting out like I’m on road: ‘Are you dumb, who you tryna twiss up?’ Tryna fight the officers and that. So, I end up getting nicked and I don’t know what I’m getting nicked for cuz I’m in prison [laughs]. I’m like what’s going on like I’m confused... When I started understanding the routine of prison and that and you can’t beat the system they always said ‘You can’t beat the system’. That was their favourite words. I ended up learning and they ended up learning me - and where they ended up learning me they could connect with me better. Cuz, if you can connect with me, I will talk freely with you. If you make me feel comfortable, I will talk. So, I’ve ended up talking to a couple of officers and they’re like ‘You’re actually a nice person you’re just hurt and that makes you seem like you’re a horrible person’.”

Kayla’s narrative of change places emphasis on the way in which she felt had staff responded to her with more understanding when she complied with “*the routine*” of the prison and “*accepted*” that she could not “*beat the system*”. Kayla’s use of a quote from staff where she recalls them reflecting on her character also reveals her desire to be understood as hurt rather than aggressive, a sentiment that is repeated consistently throughout her narrative.

It must be noted however, that whilst Kayla described part of her relationships with staff to be strained because of her own “*anger issues*” she also highlighted how stereotypes surrounding Black femininity had sometimes caused staff to misinterpret her behaviour as aggressive. The emphasis on “*learning*” one another reflects how, in this particular prison, Kayla felt her relationships with staff were dependent on both parties making changes and being more understanding. Interestingly therefore, Kayla utilised ‘Keeping Your Head Down’ as a means of getting closer to staff for support (as did Annette) which was a direct contrast to Sharon who *kept her head down* to keep away from staff so as to prevent or minimise her exposure to racism. In the next subsection I explore another strategy of appeasement used by some of the mothers to ensure their survival within, and progression through, the system.

6.4.2 Sucking it Up

Many of the mothers who felt as though processes of racialisation played a part in the experience of imprisonment had personally or vicariously experienced prejudice or

discrimination (Donna, Joy, Kayla, Linda, Malika, Sharon, Trish). Donna demonstrated a reluctance of speaking out about these experiences due to a warranted fear that it could disrupt her ability to 'progress' through the prison system and impact upon her "journey". 'Sucking it Up' is thus distinct from 'Keeping Your Head Down' as the prior describes a reactive behaviour and the former a preventative behaviour. When reflecting upon some of the "inappropriate" racist comments from "really ancient times" that she had heard prison officers use against some of the other women in prison, Donna described feeling really "cross" but having to think about the consequences that may come with challenging those in power, as described below:

"I think I've learnt now you've got to really know when to pick your battles... In this environment sometimes you've gotta be really really careful because it can backfire and then you've got to think about your journey. It doesn't sit with me sometimes that I'll go, I'm a little bit like shut up... Somebody said like 'Are you gonna suck that up' or 'Are you gonna take that?' It's like yeah, I am cuz I've got other things I need to do. And while I'm wasting my energy on that I could've been down the road doing that ... It's a lot easier to let go and not absorb all the negatives... it's good and bad officers like there's good and bad social workers."

The mothers often constructed open prison conditions as a 'privilege' that provided them with greater independence and access to mothering identities (see also Baldwin 2021), but there was also an underlying sense that such 'privileges' could also be taken away, revealing the fragile nature of open conditions, as explained in the quote above. This sense of fragility was also described by Trish who felt that her racialised identity had made her hypervisible to staff who were waiting for her to mess up and return to closed conditions. Interestingly, there was also a tension in Donna's narrative as she considered 'Sucking It Up' to be painful, as she did not feel comfortable enough to speak out, but at the same time she associated this with then being able to let things go. This tension arguably reflects Donna's need to 'suck up' the hurt of prejudice and discrimination to 'progress' through her journey of imprisonment with more ease and the 'letting go' relates more closely to her acceptance that there would always be "bad officers" and of her inability to do anything to change this.

Racism was thus perceived to be an inevitable part of imprisonment and so for Donna to "suck it up" and navigate around it was considered much safer than attempting to challenge it. This

finding is supportive of Eddo-Lodge's (2017: xii) argument that people racialised as 'non-White' often experience "a lifetime of self-censorship" in relation to speaking out about experiences of racialisation with "the options [being]: speak your truth and face the reprisal or bite your tongue and get ahead in life". It is important to acknowledge here, that like Wilson and Moore's (2003) concept of 'Keeping Quiet', 'Sucking it Up' was not seen as a display of passive silence but rather, in this instance, an active approach for 'progressing' to release as early as possible. For the mothers involved in this research, this yearning for release was not just guided by the more obvious pursuit of freedom but was largely underpinned by the desire for reunification with their children and the resumption of their mothering roles. Next, I discuss how strategies of appeasement were also visible during the production of narrative itself.

6.4.3 Having to Whisper

During my conversation with Sharon, which took place in an upstairs office within Greenhill, the pains of appeasement through self-censorship also became apparent through her embodied response to a staff member's presence in the room. Although I had requested to speak with the mothers in a private space to ensure confidentiality and to help them feel more comfortable, I was offered an office where Charlie (who was the member of staff facilitating the research) worked; and at times she entered the space. As a staff member, Charlie held the power in the room and Sharon's narrative was responsive to this dynamic reinforcing Lockwood's (2017) argument, explored in 4.9.1, that our immediate environment shapes how narratives are then able to be told, shared and produced.

Just as Sharon had begun to discuss her experiences of racial prejudice and discrimination within Greenhill, at the hands of staff members, Charlie briefly entered the room and the atmosphere and Sharon's body language immediately changed (Research notes). Sharon began to whisper rather than speak comfortably as she had done so before and at one point instead of audibly speaking the word "White" she silently mouthed it to me so that Charlie would not hear, as demonstrated in the extract below:

"[Whispers] They're not helpful... They'll see me there; they'll look me right in my face and turn their face away. But make somebody else [mouths the words White] go to the door and they'll say come in!"

Charlie's presence and power, as both a staff member and a White woman, thus disrupted the space previously protected from "White people's judgement" and institutional backlash (Blackwell 2018, para 3) that Sharon and I had begun to create, with her narrative becoming literally constrained as a result.

The brief interruption to the interview also demonstrated how Black mothers in prison, such as Sharon, may feel unable to speak freely and openly about their experiences in the presence of staff, especially White staff, adding to a more textured understanding of their experiences navigating within repressive spaces. This phenomenon is also explored by Fanon (1952) in his book "Black faces, White Masks" where he highlights that Blackness is often performed differently depending on the racialised dynamics at play within the social space. Prior to Charlie leaving the room, which was seemingly in response to the hushed whispers, Sharon and I both exchanged a look with one another as if we both knew what the other was thinking and in response to this I said "sorry", and Sharon smiled "it's alright" (Research notes). Regarding appeasement and self-censorship therefore, Charlie's momentary presence within the room acted to physically silence narratives surrounding racism and prejudice shining a light on the power-dynamics at play between White staff and Black imprisoned mothers. In the following subsection I highlight another method utilised by some mothers to self-censor themselves within the prison system.

6.4.4 Not Showing Caring

'Not Showing Caring' was a form of appeasement utilised by some of the mothers (Trish, Malika and Kayla) in response to their heightened awareness that speaking out, asking for more support and challenging the decisions made by staff could be interpreted as them causing trouble as explained by Kayla:

"You're just trying to express yourself [begins to cry] because you're so hurt and that, like I've got tears in my eyes for fucks sake how you going to tell me I'm being aggressive [sniffs]."

Reflecting on how the prison system interpreted and responded to the needs of Black women Trish expressed:

“For me what I found was being a Black woman in the prison system was really hard because, whether we want to believe it or not, we are in a country where the government has painted the Black woman to be an angry Black woman. To be one that can’t follow directions, that has a problem with authority - and that means that’s what you’re up against before you’ve even opened your mouth.”

Trish demonstrates her understanding of how the White gaze, which renders Black women’s bodies hypervisible, and in need of “suspicion”, “surveillance” and control (Puwar 2004: 54; Rabelo et al 2019), had shaped how staff viewed and treated her within the context of imprisonment. Stereotypes of Black femininity as something angry and aggressive (Chigwada-Bailey 2004) also exposed themselves through interactions with staff as explored in an earlier conversation with Trish, where she described challenging a decision made by her Offender Manager that she could not take part in a course that her “fair[er]” skinned friend could (as mentioned in subsection 6.3.1). Discussing her experience Trish reflected:

“Because I spoke up for something I believed in it got turned round that I’m aggressive... I have an issue with authority. I’ve never heard that [Claps]. Literally I’ve never heard that in my life [laughs]. So, when I heard it there, these are the things that enraged me and in any other environment I would have stood my ground and been like I’m not – but in there I was conscious of the fact I was Black. So, when I did wanna respond to things I had to learn to speak nonchalantly cuz if I show my passion and speak like I’m talking to you now very expressive this [opens arms] is aggression... So, I had to speak about things like [puts on monotone voice] ‘Well you know’ as soon as I spoke in monotone and acted as though I didn’t care then it was like ‘Oh what was that you said?’, ‘Well I’ll see what I can do!’.”

Whilst in prison, Trish had learnt how when her tone of voice and body language were “filtered through lenses of racism and sexism” (Rabelo et al 2019: 1842), as well as colourism, she became seen as “aggressive” and disruptive to authority. Puwar (2004: 50) describes this as “the automatic mutation of a Black body in movement” where an embodied response such as trembling, laughing, or in this case, hand gesturing and speaking emotively are translated by those observing them into something that must be feared. However, within the context of our conversation and away from the repressive gaze of the prison, Trish felt able to speak and move more freely as emphasised when she contrasted how she was “talking to [me] now” with how she spoke to staff. ‘Not Showing Caring’ is therefore not the act of actually ‘not caring’ or not challenging perceived injustices. But rather, the act of purposefully moving and speaking in inexpressive and unemotive ways to mitigate against the threat of racism. These findings

are similar to Warr's (2022:2) research with Black imprisoned men, where he emphasises how in order to meet the expectations associated with the assessment of risk and rehabilitation Black men begin to "perform...an acceptable, diminished, Whitened, rehabilitated 'Blackness'".

When speaking with Malika it became apparent that when she first arrived at Greenhill, she had particularly struggled with navigating within the predominately White-middle-class standards of the institution, which she described as an ongoing "fight" with staff to be listened to because she didn't "know how to talk to them" (see section 6.2). Talking through her experience of finding it hard to "get along with" staff and the impact this had on accessing ROTL to see her children, Malika stated:

"I just don't care anymore. I've passed caring so I feel that I've accomplished a lot more [in relation to ROTL] when I've showed that I just don't care anymore. Do what you want."

Here, there appears to be an association between expressing "caring" and it being wrongly translated as being difficult and so by 'Not Showing Caring' Malika felt that staff had since become more receptive to supporting contact with her children. The quote above also reveals her continued feelings of powerlessness as she concedes "*do what you want*", seemingly acknowledging the institutions demand of submissiveness. By using statements such as "*I just don't care*", Malika is able to reclaim some power by controlling the narrative in which the prison is seen to define her. It is not that she does not care but rather that she does not want to let myself, or the institution, know that she does minimising her vulnerability. Malika's approach to 'Not Showing Caring', therefore, moves beyond the temporary reactive and preventative strategies of appeasement utilised by some of the other mothers (such as changing body language, befriending/avoiding staff, whispering) and moves into a constant state of mind. However, for both Malika and Trish, 'Not Showing Caring' is a necessary mechanism for mitigating against the pains of discrimination and diminished autonomy that come with being imprisoned.

6.5 Concluding Thoughts

Many of the mothers articulated their experiences of imprisonment through a racialised lens with recognition given to the ways in which racialisation (the construction of racial categories) and racism (prejudice and discrimination based on these racialised categories) had caused them emotional and physical pain and frustration during their sentences. It is important to stress here, how Joy's narrative positioned processes of racialisation as including the construction of her '*foreignness*' in the prison system, which due to the intersections between Criminal Justice and Immigration systems had led to exacerbated and distinct experiences of discrimination and psychological harm. Narratives surrounding racialisation and racism were also at times linked to experiences of mothering, highlighting how access to desired mothering relationships were understood as being shaped by marginalising and discriminatory interactions, processes and regimes which were difficult to challenge due to the repressive power of the institution.

Racism in prison, which has been discussed in this chapter as being entrenched within the system itself, is found to have harmful consequences for Black imprisoned mothers as well as their children, families and wider communities, further evidencing the racialised and collective harm caused by imprisonment and punitive approaches to justice. Through narrating their engagement in 'Activist' and 'Protective' forms of motherwork the mothers in this thesis highlighted the need to create 'safe' strategies of resistance against such harms. This was reflected in the steps taken to either speak out against perceived inequalities and injustices (such as through focus groups, petitions, research etc.) or the finding of ways to 'appease' the system and minimise the threat of racism.

Many of the mothers thus described taking on the responsibility of additional physical and emotional labour whilst imprisoned to ensure that their needs would be met but also to protect themselves and their children, further evidencing the processes of 'responsibilisation' that necessitated such *work* in the absence of institutional care and protection. When the prison system did appear to accommodate for the needs of Black women, this was often constructed as a reactive response to their successful 'Activist Motherwork' rather than the prison system being proactive or attentive to their specific needs (see section 6.2.2), again highlighting the

racialised and gendered processes of 'responsibilisation' underpinning their experiences of mothering.

Importantly, the pains of marginalisation, discrimination and appeasement defined and considered within this chapter not only reflect the experiences that the mothers' described having with staff, other women in prison and/or the institution more broadly, but also how they understood and conceptualised their positionality as Black women and mothers in society. The mothers also discussed the intersectional nature of their experiences, for example in relation to class, skin-tone and nationality. Considering this, each mother's narrative was unique as it was responsive to her own personal identity, history and context of imprisonment. The narratives explored within this chapter therefore disrupt the notion of a universal experience for Black mothers in the prison system, showing the complexity of racialisation and racism within the context of the prison service and wider society.

The emphasis I have placed within this chapter on how racism in wider society is reflected in, maintained and exacerbated by imprisonment, further speaks to the importance of addressing the broader structural processes that lead to racial and social marginalisation. It is these processes that facilitate and justify the disproportionate criminalisation and imprisonment of Black mothers (as well their children, families and communities) and shape their experiences of racialised marginalisation and discrimination in the prison environment itself. Advocating for a society rooted in anti-racism thus requires the dismantling of state sanctioned systems of harm – such as the prison system – that reproduce but also *rationalise* racialised inequality, oppression and violence (Davis 2003b). Whilst there is racism, justice will never be fair.

In keeping with abolitionist and Black feminist abolitionist principles, therefore, this thesis argues that by challenging and questioning the assumed inevitability of the prison (an institution that permeates racialised inequality) we can begin the process of detangling the current co-dependent relationship that exists between 'racism', social marginalisation and 'punishment' (Davis 2003a; Davis 2003b; Davis et al 2022; Gilmore 2020; Kaba and Ritchie 2022). When looking at the prison through a Black feminist lens, it has become apparent that the system is irreconcilable with anti-racism. Instead, we must advocate for - and create - new and transformed societies underpinned by care and justice rather than harm and punishment

(Hayes et al 2020). We must build social structures rooted in community that challenge rather than enable inequality. As Davis et al (2022:59) writes “to render prisons... obsolete we must also build movements demanding that society be reshaped with the goal of eliminating gender and sexual violence and their enabling of racist heteropatriarchal structures”.

Chapter Seven

Life After Prison

"I still suffer now. My anxiety is through the roof. When I walked out of [Closed conditions] after doing two years, I couldn't even cross the road. I was like what the fuck. Everything was too fast for me... It was weird. I was so happy for my freedom, and I couldn't wait for it but as soon as I stepped out, I was like shit what is going on? There's no routine, no nothing." Kayla

7.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters have focused on the mothers' experiences *during* imprisonment. Attention has been given to their personal and shared narratives of mothering whilst imprisoned (Chapter Five), as well as their experiences of racialisation and racism within the prison system and the consequences of this for their mothering and other intersecting identities (Chapter Six). In this chapter, I consider how the impacts of imprisonment are felt to extend beyond the prison sentence and the physical environment of the prisons estate by focusing on the mothers' experiences, or anticipated experiences, *after* their release from prison. As highlighted in previous chapters, at the time of our conversation Annette, Donna, Malika and Sharon were imprisoned within Greenhill, therefore, where their narratives are drawn upon, they reflect their 'anticipated' or 'hoped-for' experiences following their release. However, most of the narratives represented in the following chapter were produced with Chante, Joy Kayla, Linda and Trish, who were no longer confined within the women's prisons estate, and shared their personal experiences of life after release. The time passed since their release ranged between two and 16 years (see subsection 4.8.1).

In the first section of this chapter, I consider how for some mothers the prison system had intertwined with other processes of oppression towards the end of or following their prison sentences; that being processes of deportation. Thought is given to the intersections between systems of criminal justice and immigration as well as the processes of racialisation that take place there. In the next section, I then focus on the mothers' narratives which explore their experiences of "[re]building" (Sharon) their lives after their release. Emphasis is placed on the mothers' expectations and experiences of "[re]building" a home for themselves and their children, relationships with their children in the community and their financial and educational stability. Following this I then give recognition to the different types of "activist mothering"

(see Collins 1990;1994; Naples 1992:441) that some of the mothers had engaged in, or wanted to engage in after release, again reinforcing the importance of a Black matricentric feminist perspective for acknowledging the wider boundaries of mothering responsibilities.

Continuing to use motherwork as a conceptual framework (see Collins 1994), this chapter highlights how the mothers continued to engage in what I have previously categorised as 'Protective' and 'Activist' strategies of motherwork after their release to mitigate against the disruptive and harmful impacts of imprisonment as well as social injustice more broadly. I also introduce the concept of 'Rebuilding Motherwork' to encompass the different types of work that the mothers described engaging in after their release from prison to rebuild their lives with their children and wider family in the community. However, it is important to emphasise that many of the mothers felt as though they had to take on the responsibility of such 'work' due to being subjected to the institutional harm of imprisonment as well as feeling overlooked, uncared for and unprotected in the criminal justice system and by society more broadly. Within the chapter I thus illustrate how narratives of motherwork are also reflective of processes of 'responsibilisation' which result in Black mothers having to demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity and in the absence of wider strategies of social support (see section 7.3).

7.2 Deportation

"How am I gonna go without my son?" Joy

The threat of deportation following imprisonment was discussed in both Annette and Joy's narratives. Both narratives provided an insight into how criminal justice and immigration systems are experienced as intertwined with one another (see also Bosworth 2010; Kaufman 2012; Stumpf⁶⁴ 2007; Noronha 2018); leading to the possibility of continued, and arguably heightened, experiences of social alienation, as well as maternal separation (see also Tomaszewska 2016). Section 19(6) of the Immigration Act (2014:117c) "requires" the deportation of anyone who is classified as a "foreign criminal" and receives a custodial sentence of more than four years, unless there are "compelling" circumstances, that surpass usual exceptional circumstances, such as one's ties to Britain and the impacts of familial

⁶⁴ Stumpf (2006) developed the term 'cimmigration' to describe the increasingly intertwined nature of criminal justice and immigration laws, policies and processes.

separation. For mothers who are also classified as ‘foreign nationals’, therefore, experiences of imprisonment may extend far beyond their actual custodial sentence; with confinement continuing within the women’s prisons estate, ‘immigration removal centres’, or the community whilst awaiting or appealing deportation and then following deportation when they are prevented from being able to return to Britain and/or their families, friends and communities.

Noronha (2020:24) argues classifications of citizenship are inherently racialised as “race is produced by and through borders” with the construction, rejection and exclusion of ‘other’ cultures being a means of racialisation in itself (see also Gilroy 1987; Kaufman 2012; Back and Sinha 2012; Erel and Reynolds 2018). As discussed in section 2.3, processes of racialisation not only refer to classifications based on physical appearance but also classifications based on culture and nationality as both together, or independently lend themselves to constructions of *belonging* and *otherness*. For mothers who are not only constructed as ‘Black’ but also as ‘foreign nationals’, therefore, racialised marginalisation is likely to be experienced in multiple layers highlighting the complexity of contemporary racism. The representation of Joy’s and Annette’s narratives below, thus adds to an understanding of the multiple and intersecting forms of oppression experienced by imprisoned mothers who are not only racialised as ‘Black’ but who are also simultaneously racialised as ‘non-British’.

In keeping with the judge’s recommendation at sentencing, Joy was served a deportation order towards the end of her seven-year custodial sentence, of which she served three-and-a-half-years. Remembering her experience of being served this order whilst still imprisoned, she explained:

“They wanted for me to be deported but my son should stay. How is that possible? And I was not going to let that happen. When they were serving the deportation order, a friend of mine said to me when he visited, he said: ‘Why would they send you home and they leave your son here? Your sister is not adopting your son. She has not made any move to say she is adopting your son. She is just looking after him for you to come and take him’.”

Within her narrative, Joy utilised her friend’s words as a means of representing and perhaps also validating the pain she had felt when learning that she was to be deported without her

son (who was under five years old) – a pain that was heightened by the Home Office’s assumption that her son would stay in Britain and be cared for by her sister. Noronha (2018:284) argues that when considering the “best interests of the child” the Home Office usually determines that it is “unduly harsh for children to move” or be deported with their parents – either leading to parents being separated from their children or children experiencing vicarious deportation (and removal from their homes) by leaving Britain with their parents. For Joy, who had been separated from her son less than a year after his birth, deportation was thus another legal process, in addition to imprisonment, that had the power to further restrict, challenge and devalue her mothering identity.

Note, I used the term ‘further’ above as Joy’s motherhood had been devalued throughout her experience within these intersected systems: from being advised by the doctor to have an abortion because she was in prison, the prison’s lack of facilities preventing her from expressing milk, not being allowed to ‘progress’ to open conditions and then to being served a deportation order that would require her to leave Britain without her son. For criminalised Black mothers classified as ‘foreign nationals’, processes of imprisonment, ‘illegalisation’⁶⁵ and exclusion thus work together to challenge and undermine mothers’ relationships and identities as well as their children’s right to be mothered. In keeping with Vrabiescu’s (2021) argument therefore, the deportation of criminalised mothers, which is often justified under the guise of social protection, is an additional form of punishment that reproduces a differentiation between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ migrant women leading to the devaluing of the latter. In comparison to the other mothers who were all classified as British, Joy’s experience thus demonstrates how the marginalisation of motherhood comes to be further aggravated by the instability of citizenship status.

During our conversation, Joy described how she had been placed on suicide watch whilst imprisoned, as she had self-harmed “*a lot*”. As a result of this, the doctors and psychologists within the prison were questioning whether she should be deported “*with no plan in place for [her] treatment*”. She detailed how when she first entered the criminal justice systems, she

⁶⁵ Noronha (2018:2416) uses the term illegalisation to refer to the processes by which the state utilises its power to “actively illegalise non-citizens through legal categorisation and coercive power.

“wasn’t taking no medication [and] there wasn’t nothing wrong with [her]”, emphasising the traumatic nature of imprisonment and the consequence of this for her mental wellbeing. Whilst imprisoned Joy described being referred to appropriate services within the prison to help her fight her deportation:

“One of the people working in the prison was Barnardo’s... They had some contacts and they linked me up with another organisation that was helping migrants. They were supporting migrants facing deportation and they helped me ... I applied for bail the judge refused and said I was gonna abscond. Said I was gonna run away. ‘Why is she gonna run away?’ my defence was saying. ‘She’s got family she’s got a son. She’s got health conditions it’s in her best interest not to run away because how is she gonna get her treatment?’ You understand? ‘She’s not going to run away; she’s got friends who are saying she is going to stay at their place for them to bail her at their address’... The judge said no and then we applied for another bail four weeks later and the judge said no. The reason he said no was because the Home Office said my deportation is imminent it’s going to happen just now. The judge said ... he shouldn’t be keeping me in prison with all these things in prison, the record of my mental health and this and that, he shouldn’t be keeping me in detention but he’s going to give them [the Home Office] the benefit of the doubt ... [up to a month] later I was still in prison.”

As highlighted above, Joy’s application for bail (so that she could appeal or await her deportation whilst in the community with her son) was denied on multiple occasions as her deportation was positioned as *“imminent”* by the Home Office. However, following her time in prison, she had spent months within the immigration removal centre awaiting her deportation. Drawing upon my conceptualisation of *‘sticky notions of time’*, introduced in Chapter Six, the experiences of mothers classified as *‘foreign nationals’* within systems of crimmigration are seen to be characterised by an inability to move and heightened feelings of indeterminacy and uncertainty, not only in relation to being imprisoned but also the possibility of deportation and continued maternal separation. Eventually, Joy’s application for bail was approved and she went to live at her friend’s house where she fought to and succeeded in having her deportation prevented. It is necessary to stress here, that the decision to stop Joy’s deportation was entirely independent of her mothering identity as her deportation was prevented based on other grounds, further demonstrating the ways in which motherhood may come to be devalued and challenged by processes of crimmigration.

Joy was not the only mother I spoke with whose narrative explored the threat of deportation after imprisonment and its impact on mothering identities. As a Black imprisoned daughter, towards the end of her custodial sentence Annette was facing the possible deportation of her mother who was also imprisoned within the women's prisons estate:

"We are each other's support network but because she's a foreign national she's been shipped to [closed private prison] to deal with her immigration. She got over four years, so they look at possibly shipping her to [European Country] which is not gonna happen because she's been here since she was four. So, it's just a matter of them finding her right to stay. She came over I think it was in the Windrush generation⁶⁶, they came over on their parents' passports, so they haven't got any paperwork to say indefinite stay - but they do have it. So, she's dealing with that and we're hoping to hopefully have her here [Greenhill] sometime this year."

Annette's narrative highlights the impact of deportation not only in relation to motherhood but also daughterhood and demonstrates the way in which coloniality and political constructions of citizenship - through processes of illegalisation - challenge and threaten personal understandings of belonging (see also Bosworth and Kaufman 2011; Kaufman 2012; Noronha 2020), as emphasised in Annette's comment *"she's been here since she was four"*. Annette thus understood her mother as belonging, despite legal definitions, often reliant upon documentation and proof of a substantial connection to Britain, constructing her as *other* (see also Tomaszewska 2016; Noronha 2020).

Situating Annette's narrative within the wider context of the Windrush scandal, which has seen Caribbean-born people in Britain without documentation wrongly "denied access to their bank accounts... healthcare and other state benefits" as well as being rendered destitute, being detained and/or deported (Hewitt 2020:108), Annette and her mother's experience demonstrates how through the wide net of crimmigration, Caribbean-born criminalised mothers of this particular generation become particularly vulnerable to racialised processes of exclusion and expulsion. This threat is not faced by 'British-born' criminalised mothers. Reynolds (2020:6) argues that 'hostile environment' policy surrounding the Windrush scandal

⁶⁶ The 'Windrush generation' is a term that has become commonly used to describe those who migrated to Britain from the Caribbean between 1948 and 1973 (Hewitt 2020). According to Hewitt (2020:109) many children who entered Britain on their parents' passports "knew of no other home and perceived of themselves as British, but did not have the paperwork to confirm their legal status".

is “rooted in a deep-seated and nostalgic yearning for a return to British Empire and colonial past” which denies Black mothers “the right to be full active citizens” and reproduces notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ migration. However, Annette’s mother faced the additional weight of not only being othered in relation to hostile processes of illegalisation (experienced by non-British citizens who come to be classified as illegal) but also in relation to the stigma of criminalisation (as a result of her being imprisoned) – again reflecting the intersectional nature of experience.

It is also necessary to stress how these political classifications of citizenship had consequences for the relationship between Annette and her mother during their imprisonment (through being confined within different prisons due to their different citizenship statuses) and also after their imprisonment (through the possibility of her mother’s deportation), despite being each other’s main networks of support. Annette’s narrative thus further demonstrates how processes within the prisons estate and systems of immigration are intersected and work together to further criminalise, exclude and marginalise those who are not classified as belonging which also has consequences for the children they may be forced to leave behind. Separation may thus not only be experienced by imprisonment but also through deportation.

In keeping with Black feminist abolitionist perspectives as well as the eventual goal of decarceration, that is to reduce and dismantle the prison estate that causes disproportionate harm to marginalised people and their families, decriminalising ‘immigration’ would thus challenge prison expansion as well as the logics of racism that rationalise and enable the punishment of people, who come to be ‘illegalised’, through processes of detention, imprisonment and deportation (see Davis 2003a; Kaba and Ritchie 2022). The social project of abolition thus requires significant political, social and legal change across society as a whole and not just in relation to the prison estate. Before moving to the next section that focuses on the mothers’ hopes, expectations and lived experiences of rebuilding life after release, it is important to emphasise here how Annette’s narrative contained hope: hope for her and her mother’s lives after prison. She hoped for their reunification, and she believed that her mother would receive her indefinite leave to remain.

7.3 Rebuilding

Throughout the mothers' narratives, imprisonment was largely constructed as an experience that had destabilised, pulled apart, and at the very least redefined many of the foundational blocks of their lives. This included access to their homes, everyday routines, relationships with children and wider familial networks, employment and education. Narratives of life after release were therefore centred around Black mothers' expectations and experiences of putting back together these foundations as well as "*building*" (Sharon) them from anew to create a sense of stability and security for themselves and their children. However, as Opsal (2015:190) notes, "prisons seldom effectively address the needs of the women they house" but rather imprisonment largely "ends up increasing women's experiences of marginalisation and social inequity which affects their release and return to the community". Continuing to work with the concept of 'motherwork' (see Collins 1994), the "*work*" (Sharon) done by Black mothers to rebuild their lives after release from prison will be represented throughout this section with emphasis also placed on the systematic barriers in place within wider society that underpin such work for Black mothers.

Before looking more closely at rebuilding, it is important to briefly contextualise the mothers' experiences foregrounding their release. As outlined in section 4.8.2, the mothers who *had* received custodial sentences had been sentenced to between one-and-a-half and nine years⁶⁷ (with only one mother being sentenced to less than four years) and had thus spent extended periods of time separated from their families and the outside world. Many of the mothers' imprisoned narratives also indicated '*stretched*' and '*sticky*' experiences of time (see Chapter Six) relating to racialised barriers to 'progression', employment/education and child reunification within the prison system which intensified feelings of separation and disconnection to both their mothering and other personal identities. Narratives of building and rebuilding life after release therefore follow on from the mothers' experiences of lengthy familial separation and disruption, as well as personal experiences of racialised oppression,

⁶⁷ As highlighted in section 3.2, women racialised as 'non-White' are more likely than women racialised as White to receive longer custodial sentences (Ministry of Justice 2022). Therefore, extended maternal separation because of imprisonment – which has implications for rebuilding - can to some extent be seen as racialised.

within the criminal justice system. For many of the mothers, motherwork after release had become centred around rebuilding their lives with their children, as well as their own self-worth, and mitigating against further harm to their families. The following subsections demonstrate this type of 'Rebuilding Motherwork' in relation to rebuilding a home, relationships and financial stability.

7.3.1 A Home

"There was no help at all. Not with housing nothing at all ... I lived with my [Adult] daughter for two years when I came out and had to fight the council to get somewhere" Linda

According to O'Brien (2001:289) "home [is] both a metaphor and a physical place of being [that is] crucial to human wellbeing". Within the mothers' narratives, "home" (Chante; Donna; Kayla; Malika; Sharon) was often positioned as a central physical space or "hub" (Donna) for the nurturing of their children (see section 5.2.2). However, due to imprisonment most⁶⁸ of the mothers had lost their homes (Annette; Donna; Joy; Kayla; Linda; Sharon and Trish), in keeping with existing research by the Prison Reform Trust (2020:2) that reports "nearly six out of ten women leaving prison have nowhere safe to go". Consequently, securing housing and rebuilding their home was often constructed by the mothers as an important part of motherwork relating to life after release to provide a sense of stability and security for themselves and their children. Expressing her concerns surrounding housing insecurity, Sharon shared:

"I interact with Ixion⁶⁹ and that was for me to find out information about [housing]. I've been doing it two years in advance because I'm out next year and I haven't got a home for me and my son when we leave. But I was already gathering the information of private or council? And when can I go to the council? When can I start looking for somewhere? Because I want somewhere the day I leave. I have to have my own key. Can't go to a hostel - I've got a teenage boy and plus I wouldn't have that."

"The help's not been that great to be honest ... But in my head my plan is further down the year I will do the work myself ... I will call the council whichever area I choose to go to and one of the girls she's doing it now - there's a form you fill out and it asks you if you're leaving

⁶⁸ Chante and Malika had been able to keep their homes during their imprisonment.

⁶⁹ Ixion is a non-profit organisation providing advice, education and training for people who are imprisoned.

prison when you're leaving prison so forth. And [I just found] out about a charity that houses women from [Greenhill]... but I'm yet to find out the correct information."

Sharon's narrative demonstrates the difficulty she faced identifying relevant and "correct" information about how to secure a "home" for herself and her son after her release, whilst she was still imprisoned. The information she had come across appeared to be largely through word of mouth from other imprisoned women rather than support services commissioned by the prison.

Later in her narrative Sharon did identify third sector organisations based within the prison such as NARCO and St.Mungos that supported women with housing. However, she believed - perhaps based on what she had heard from other women or through her interactions with staff - that "they normally put [people] in hostels... And deal with girls that are ex-addicts, ex-alcoholics" and she was "none of those". As a result, Sharon felt she had been left to "crack on by [her]self", a sentiment shared with some of the other mothers' I spoke with, arguably reflecting the expected or assumed resilience of Black women that may act to lessen the processes in place to support their specific needs. 'Rebuilding Motherwork' towards the end of Sharon's sentence involved having to individually carry out "work" relating to housing (such as gathering information, phoning the council etc.) to better ensure the likelihood of having her "own key" (a symbol of security and autonomy) by the time of her release. For Sharon, having her own key would mean access to a private and personal space - a home - in which she could mother her teenage son, something she did not feel she would be able to do in a hostel. Housing was therefore not just about shelter, but also about providing a foundational space for rebuilding a home (see also Opsal 2015:201) and protecting children (see also Mitchell and Davis 2019).

Chante was the only mother I spoke with in the community who had returned to her home after release. Amongst the mothers who were no longer imprisoned, the more common narrative was that the prison service had "release[d] [them] with nowhere to go" (Kayla) (see also Prison Reform Trust 2020; Bozinka and Hardwick 2021⁷⁰). Joy described staying with

⁷⁰ Research conducted by Bozinka and Hardwick (2021) found that 26% of 156 "rough sleepers" who listed prison as their last address were racialised as Black "African", "Caribbean" or "Other" and 7%

friends and family for over a year, Linda had stayed with her daughter for two years and Kayla had temporarily lived with her friend. These experiences highlight the importance of extended familial and friendship networks for providing support in the absence of institutional resources. Recalling her experience of acquiring housing after release, Trish remarked:

“Because I am so independent, and I am so organised ... I planned. So, for me what was the point of going to open if I’m not looking into my housing? Especially as my housing had a big part to do with my criminal behaviour. For me it’s important to be settled because I don’t wanna feel the pressure I felt that pushed me to committing a criminal offence ... But I came out and I had no help with getting housing. I sorted out my own housing for me and my daughter... I went straight to the housing on the day that I came out from prison, and I sat in there ... I told them look I’m not going home without somewhere ... They gave me a temporary accommodation. Two years down the line I’m still in that temporary accommodation... All that you’re told is we are short of houses.”

Trish’s narrative highlights the importance she placed on housing stability for feeling “settled” and secure (see also O’Brien 2001), as the financial pressure she had experienced before being imprisoned, to support herself and her teenage daughter, had largely led to her offence. Like Sharon, Trish emphasised the steps she had taken to secure “accommodation” for herself and her daughter both during and after her release as a result of not having received any institutional support. The motherwork undertaken by Black mothers in regard to housing can be seen as a necessary survival response to being overlooked within the prison system and by housing services; and arguably the social expectations often placed on Black mothers through processes of ‘responsibilisation’ to demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity in keeping with the narrative of the ‘Black superwoman’ (see section 2.7.2). However, for Trish, who was still in temporary accommodation two years after her release, the unsettling and disruptive nature of imprisonment had extended far beyond her prison sentence and had resulted in continued experiences of marginalisation and insecurity within the community.

Trish had also tried to rent privately but due to discriminatory practices surrounding her being a “single parent with a minor” receiving “a percentage of housing benefit” she described being “turned away left right and centre”, demonstrating the gendered and classed based

were racialised as Black mixed-race. Whilst this data is not separated by gender it does highlight the overrepresentation of Black people within homeless populations following a period of imprisonment.

inequalities within the private housing sector that also acted to further marginalise her (see Shelter 2021). Positioning her narrative within the current social context of housing insecurity, it is necessary to acknowledge the wider structural inequalities that single Black single mothers face more broadly which, when intersected with the inequalities faced by mothers leaving prison, are likely to form unique barriers to accessing secure and safe housing. According to Shelter (2021) 57% of Black adults in Britain do not have access to a safe or secure home as well as 65% of women who identify as single mothers (Shelter 2021). Trish's experience of housing insecurity as a Black "single" mother, whose partner was facing long term imprisonment, therefore sits within the intersections of multiple forms of structural oppression relating to class, gender, race and processes of criminalisation.

Barriers to creating a *home* were also found to be shaped by constructions of citizenship. Describing her early experiences after being released from the immigration removal centre, Joy recalled:

"I was basically supported by my friends, my sister and my cousin. I joined an organisation called Women in Prison and I was attending some of their programmes in the community but there was nothing like mother and baby groups. Nothing like support for people who have just been released.... Until one year after I got my status to stay - my papers to stay in the country - I wasn't entitled to any benefits. I was just being supported by family basically. It was not until when I got the freedom to live in the country that I have benefit ... housing benefit and child benefit."

In keeping with a Black feminist approach, a consideration of Joy's experience is considered vital for furthering an understanding of the intersectional nature of Black mothers' experiences following release (see Crenshaw 1991). Joy's experience of marginalisation in the community was heightened by her being subjected to the conditions of immigration bail as a 'foreign national' and having no recourse to public funds, which further restricted her ability to provide for herself or her son after her release. Erel et al (2017: para 1) state that "The No Recourse to Public Funding (NRPF) policy means that migrants subject to immigration control are not allowed to access many benefits, tax credits or housing assistance" and as a result are often "pushed to the margins of society as a result of poverty and racism". Consequently, whilst appealing her deportation Joy did not feel supported by anyone other than her friends and family; demonstrating how constructions of citizenship, which are enforced at the

intersections of the criminal justice and immigration Systems, act to disempower, other and alienate those who are not categorised as *'belonging'* (see also Bosworth 2010).

As Joy described being *"supported"* by friends and family, the informal support networks available to her whilst she had been imprisoned appeared to also extend their support following her release. However, as Joy was not entitled to any additional resources this would likely have placed further financial pressure on her family and friends, some of whom she described as being *"on benefits"* and as having a very small amount of savings. The impacts of *"anti-immigration policies"* (Erel et al 2017: para 4), similarly to imprisonment (see Chapter Five), therefore also extend to, and impact the lives of, family and friends who continue to work together after release to provide care in the absence of formal support. It is also vital to emphasise that without having access to these informal networks of support it is likely that Joy would have been rendered destitute⁷¹ as she was not deemed as being worthy of and financial support and care by the state.

Joy's narrative stresses the importance of including previously imprisoned mothers, classified in the prison system as *'foreign nationals'* within narratives of *'resettlement'*. Mothers classified as *'foreign nationals'* have largely⁷² been overlooked within existing academic discourses regarding the needs and experiences of mothers *after* imprisonment and the further development of strategies for support post-release. Joy's narrative also touches upon the lack of programmes within the community to *"support"* mothers post-release to rebuild and strengthen relationships with their children. Rebuilding is therefore not solely discussed in relation to creating a literal *home*, but establishing or restabilising mothering identities and relationships which exists within and outside of this *"physical"* (O'Brien 2001:289) space. Mothering thus provides a *"metaphorical"* (O'Brien 2001:289) sense of home, comfort and security, as explored in the following subsection.

⁷¹ According to Section 95(3) of the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act a person is classified as destitute if *"they do not have adequate accommodation or any means of obtaining it ... or have adequate accommodation or the means of obtaining it but cannot meet their other essential living needs"*.

⁷² Note, the non-profit organisation Hibiscus provide specialist support to Black, minoritised and migrant women and their families whose experiences are situated at the intersections of imprisonment and immigration.

7.3.2 Mothering Relationships

The mothers I spoke with at Greenhill discussed their future aspirations and expectations for their mothering relationships outside of the context of imprisonment. Imagining her future with her pre-adolescent son in the community, Donna affirmed:

“I’m gonna be creating a new life but I think there’s parts of my old life which I had created for myself without my ex-partner’s influence and why should I have to give them all up? And they were really good for our son. And that, I think that’s really good for him to have parts of our old life that really worked, that continuity and I think that’s actually enabled him to be really quite grounded.”

Whilst an aspect of her motherwork post-release would be “*creating a new life*”, Donna also described her need to hold on to the positive aspects of her and her son’s “old life” that had existed before imprisonment. As highlighted in section 5.2.2., Donna had experienced domestic violence and coercive and financial control in her previous relationship with her son’s father. The separation within her narrative, between aspects of her life she had personally “*created*” for herself and those that were shaped by her ex-partner, therefore, reflected her need to reclaim the aspects of her identity and lifestyle that existed outside of his control. Aspects of her old life that she mentioned included maintaining her relationships with some of the other mothers at her son’s school, which she had described as being a great support for her son during imprisonment, and she felt that these relationships were really important for her and her son’s sense of routine, stability and “*continuity*”. Donna’s aspirations for her new life were thus underpinned by her understandings of her son’s needs and the importance she placed on wider communal networks of support and friendship.

Also visualising her life after release, Sharon remarked:

“I just can’t wait for this horrible experience to be over and I’m just away from these people. Yeah, and I’ll make sure I’m never coming to a place like this again. Yeah, and just worry about my family and building back my relationship with them and building up my home... It’s gonna be a little bit of work but the main work is with my teenage son and I’m sure he’ll be alright eventually.”

Sharon viewed her relationships with her family as well as having a sense of “*home*” as something she would need to build “*back*”, because of the disruptive and destabilising nature of imprisonment. Throughout her narrative, she had discussed her teenage son’s behaviour as

“rebellious” and as having become extremely difficult to manage since being imprisoned as he had “struggled a lot” with their separation because of her long-term prison sentence (see also section 5.2.2). Consequently, when thinking about “rebuilding” life after release, Sharon anticipated the process of getting her son “back straight” as being “hard, hard work” that would also be closely intertwined with her mothering responsibilities in the community. Although such “work” was constructed as being largely inaccessible whilst she was imprisoned (see section 5.2.2.) as it was seen to be dependent upon her physical and emotional proximity to her family, Sharon’s narrative illustrated her feelings of hope for the future.

For Black working-class mothers, like Sharon, whose Black sons are disproportionality excluded from school, overpoliced, detained⁷³ and faced with child criminal exploitation⁷⁴ (see HM Inspectorate of Probation 2021; Hunter 2020) there may also be an additional pressure to keep children “straight” (Sharon) to protect them from harm and possible state-intervention (see also Mitchell and Davis 2019). However, for Black imprisoned mothers this work is also heightened by their own experiences of criminalisation as Annette reflected how, due to its traumatic and disruptive nature, maternal imprisonment increased “*The chance of your child coming to prison*”. Gurusami’s (2019:135) concept of “hypervigilant motherwork”, based on conversations with previously imprisoned Black mothers in America, refers to the intensive and surveillance-based mothering practices that mothers engage in post-imprisonment to protect their children from harm within their communities and by the state (see section 3.11). This concept of hypervigilant motherwork somewhat reflects Sharon’s *expectations* of the protective “[mother]work” she would need to do with her son after her release, as seen in the emphasis she placed on them sharing a “home” so she could mother him more *closely* (see previous section 7.3.1).

Whilst the mothers I spoke with at Greenhill provided an insight into *expectations* and *hopes* of what mothering would be like after release, the mothers I spoke with who were no longer

⁷³ 41% of children in custody were Black or Black-mixed-race in 2020 and 35% of remanded children were Black. There was also an entire youth custody institution where every boy imprisoned was Black or Black-mixed-race (HM Inspectorate of Probation 2021).

⁷⁴ Child criminal exploitation describes the abuse faced by children who are coerced into committing crime.

imprisoned were able to highlight the lived realities of such experiences. In the ten years since her release, Joy had never told her son about her imprisonment or the circumstances of his birth:

"I find it difficult to tell him because I'm just looking at him and I'm thinking is it the right time? What time is the best time? When should I be able to tell him? But I think compared to how I felt about it two years ago I think I'm nearer the time I think he might be ready. He's growing, maturing obviously [A teenager] now so do you understand? But I'm still anxious. I'm still anxious... I think it's guilt of not practising what I preach. Because, due to my experience I'm very strict of saying this is wrong not wanting - trying to mould him and tell him this is wrong, don't do this ... But then I guess another thing in my head is telling me what if one day he hears from somebody else do you understand? So that's what I'm trying to weigh which is best. Is it now? Tomorrow, is it soon? ...[Sighs] I think I need support in that aspect."

Her narrated feelings of shame and "guilt" surrounding imprisonment – which she had previously described as being heightened because of her West African "background" and the cultural stigma associated with imprisonment appeared to make it harder for her to share such information with her teenage son especially as she had adopted a "strict" approach to mothering in attempt to prevent him from engaging in criminal behaviour. Similarly to Sharon, therefore, Joy also emphasised the necessity of having 'Protective Motherwork' strategies in place not only to nurture, but also to shield, her son from the harm of criminalisation.

Interestingly, for Joy, strategies for 'Protective Motherwork' were not only guided by her need to protect her son from potential future criminalisation (such as by being strict and educating him about right and "wrong") but also to protect them both from the shame surrounding her own past. Not telling her son about her experience of imprisonment and the circumstances of his birth was therefore a 'Protective Motherwork' strategy in itself and protected the identity she had formulated for herself as his mother which her disclosure may have the power to tarnish. In her work, Baldwin (2018:53) conducted interviews with mothers who had never disclosed their imprisonment to their children/grandchildren as a result of the "emotional legacy of the guilt and shame" with a focus on protection. The notion of 'Protective Motherwork' thus provides a framework for understanding the purposive strategies utilised by some mothers as a means of survival and identity formulation. In the following subsection I further explore the mothers' narrated experiences of mothering post-release.

7.3.3 Missed Time

Describing the way in which imprisonment had shaped her relationship with her daughter after release, Trish reflected:

“I came out as my daughter was going into secondary school. I know what that transition in life does to a young person but especially a young girl. Going to prison made me a lot more quiet and I’m more of a - don’t get me wrong I’m a chatterbox but [laughs] I have a lot more like - I understand the importance of taking time away and meditating and thinking over things do you know what I mean? And that is quite a contrast to the person that went away. So obviously coming out my daughter is having to get used to a new mum. I’m having to get to know a young girl that went through a lot of transitions when I was inside. My daughter started her lady time whilst I was in prison, and you know when I went away my daughter didn’t have bosoms and I came back and she’s a double E... My family have said I’ve changed, and I feel like they find it hard it hard to get to grips with this new person who is a lot more quiet and does spend a lot more time by herself... But then at the same time it’s made me slow down ... I’m not just on autopilot which is what I was on before. Whereas now, I’m taking time. I know I’m proper taking time, not just assuming I know what she likes and is interested in because I’m her mum. I’m taking time like ‘What do you like? Do you actually like that?’, and you know it’s really good cuz I’ve just forced pink on her all of these years, and I know purple’s her favourite colour and she’s like ‘Mum I cannot stand pink I’ve never liked it’ I’m like ‘Oh gosh I thought you loved it’ [laughs].”

I have previously conceptualised time as being ‘*Stretched*’ and ‘*Sticky*’ for Black imprisoned mothers, who face structural barriers to “progression’ and movement within the prison system and who are likely to receive lengthy custodial sentences (see Ministry of Justice 2020a;2022) and thus long periods of maternal separation. However, time in the outside world is constructed within Trish’s narrative above as also being ‘*Missed*’ (see also Baldwin 2018; Moran 2012; Wahidin 2006). Trish’s narrative shifts between describing the bodily and emotional changes that her daughter had gone through whilst she had been imprisoned and the emotional and behavioural changes that she had experienced because of being imprisoned. These descriptions provide an insight into the sense of *relative* unfamiliarity that may exist between mother and daughter following a period of forced separation and the process of having to ‘relearn’ and reattune with one another after release, because of their ‘*Missed Time*’ together (see also Wahidin 2006).

Imprisonment was felt to have completely redefined Trish’s mothering identity, as she now labelled herself as “*a new mum*”. Continuing to work with concepts of time, Trish constructed

her new approach to mothering after her release as much slower and more careful as she positively described “*taking her time*” and “*slow[ing] down*” to really get to know her daughter in a way that she felt she had not done before. Notably, Trish’s narrative also described her more slow and careful approach to nurturing maternal relationships following her imprisonment in relation to both her motherhood and her daughterhood:

“It just made us take time with each other. We have a better relationship. I spend time with my mum now... I realised that my mum still wants to get to know me just because I’m an adult and I’m busy living my own life. My mum wants to still know me.”

Even in adulthood, therefore, Trish felt that she and her mother needed and valued their connection to one another. It is thus worth emphasising that for many mothers who have previously experienced imprisonment the rebuilding of maternal relationships after release may not solely be thought of in relation to connecting and reconnecting with their own children but also with their mothers as such relationships are also redefined, disrupted and/or challenged by imprisonment. Experiences of daughterhood are thus also impacted by imprisonment.

Notions of ‘Missed Time’ were also prevalent within Kayla’s narrative as she reflected:

“It was hard to connect with Charnell because she grew. Like she started becoming a little madam and that. So, when I’m talking to her it’s like ‘Oh you’re not my mum’ so that kind of like - uh yeah that kinda hurt still. And I believe if I didn’t go prison that never would’ve happened... If I had more - if I could’ve connected and bonded with her and that... So, it was a bit hard with them still. But my baby, my baby loves me. He knows mummy.”

As discussed previously, Kayla defined herself as a mother to her ex-girlfriend’s ‘biological’ children as well as the son that they had together. Before her experiences of imprisonment, she described her daughter Charnell as being very “*comfortable*” with her, as she illustrated through her statement: “*There’s certain things that my daughter would come to me about that she wouldn’t go to her mum about and I’m not her mum*”. However, due to the disruptive nature of imprisonment, and the time missed due to forced maternal separation, Kayla and her daughter had somewhat lost their sense of connection and bond. The change in their

relationship was encapsulated in the recollection of her daughter's rejection: "*You're not my mum*", a statement that appeared to represent her daughter's loss of trust in the stability of their relationship.

Ganong et al (2011:398) argue that stepchildren often "vary in their openness to developing bonds with their stepparents". Through their research with "emerging adults" they identified five different stepparent relationship development trajectories which they categorised as "Liking from the start", "Accepting with ambivalence", "Changing trajectories", "Rejecting the stepparent" and "Coexisting" (Ganong et al 2011:401-407). For Kayla, the 'Missed Time' between herself and Charnell had *changed the trajectory* in their relationship from acceptance to rejection, as their bond had become strained by their experiences of separation. Kayla's experiences of rebuilding relationships with her older children following imprisonment were therefore seemingly heightened by the construction of her 'stepmother' identity within her family which now positioned her as somewhat peripheral in proximity to the children she had mothered and for whom she closely cared.

Continuing to work with concepts of 'Missed Time' Joy, who had given birth to her son whilst imprisoned, felt that their relationship had been forever affected by their experience of "*separation*" (following the time they spent together on an MBU of less than a year) which had been "*hard to come back from*". Following her release, she had struggled to "*know what to do*" with her son in the community as they had been physically separated through imprisonment for around three years and she was also a first-time mum. Describing the lasting psychological impact of separation on her now teenage son, despite him not knowing about the circumstances of his birth or their period of separation, Joy reflected: "*Until two years ago and I'm not in the house he panics, 'Mum where are you?'*". For Joy, therefore, the psychological trauma of maternal separation was understood as having a continued effect on her son's feeling of security and stability as short incidences of separation continued to evoke heightened feelings of anxiety (see also Bowlby 1953;1969 and Ainsworth 1962). In the next subsection I focus on elements of the mothers' narratives that centre on rebuilding their work and educational identities after release.

7.3.4 Financial Stability, Routine and Purpose

“When you come out of prison you need funding. You need something cuz right now if I could find a charity that could fund me to do my business, I’d be so happy but there’s nothing. There’s no help when you come out. You’re like stuck” Linda

Throughout their narratives many of the mothers seemed to emphasise their engagement in paid work as well as education before, during and after their prison sentences (Donna; Chante; Joy; Kayla; Malika and Trish). For these mothers, the detailing of their occupations and educational qualifications⁷⁵ provided an insight into the identities they held for themselves, the meanings they attributed to their sense of self-worth and purpose as well as their economic positioning within society. As explored in section 2.4, Collins (1987:5) argues that due to constructions and expectations of Black motherhood, Black mothers have seldom been able to view mothering as their only “occupation”. Historically, for Black and marginalised mothers, an engagement in paid work has been a necessary means of ensuring the survival of themselves, their families and communities as a result of the intersections of gender, racialisation and class. Through her research with Black mothers in Britain, Reynolds (2001) emphasises how ‘paid work’ was often constructed as being central to ‘mothering’, challenging ‘traditional’ feminist literature that had often sought to separate the two. Understanding the mothers’ experiences of engaging, or trying to engage in, paid work after release provides an insight into the way in which the established historical association between Black motherhood and paid labour is shaped, impacted and perhaps challenged by the context of imprisonment (see also previous sections 5.4.2 and 6.3.1).

Recalling her experience of seeking employment after her release from prison, Kayla noted:

“When I first came out, like I said I got extended diplomas and stuff so I am qualified. I can do accounts and all of that. Before I was even [engaging in crime], or whatever, I worked in an [office] and when I’ve come out and done the interviews - I had about ten interviews and as soon as I said I’d been to prison yeah, I aint got the job... I couldn’t get a job for long. Then I gave up and that’s why I ended up doing what I was doing again.”

⁷⁵ These details included a range of professions based within youth, mental health, cosmetology, travel, culinary and retail services and illegal work as well as college and university qualifications. At times emphasis was also placed on the frequency of such work (such as, full-time, or part-time whilst in education) as well as the number of jobs being worked at the same time (such as, one mother described having to work two jobs).

Before being imprisoned she had engaged in both legal and illegal work to support herself and her family. However, after her release from prison, as a result of several potential employers' negative perceptions of her criminal record, she had not been able to find legal employment despite having relevant qualifications and experience. In their 'Worse-Case Scenario' report, Working Chance (2021), who work with women seeking employment after imprisonment, state that 35% of the women they support are Black. The report also notes, that "Through [their] experience supporting these women, [they] have seen a clear correlation between their gender, race and chances of securing meaningful and sustainable employment" (Working Chance 2021:4). It is therefore likely that Kayla's experience was not only shaped by the social stigma surrounding her criminal record but also the barriers to legalised employment faced by Black working class women more broadly which together had resulted in her temporary return to illegal work. Discussing her current situation relating to her employment at the time of our conversation, Kayla shared:

"I did my diploma and extended diploma level 3. I had to do that to occupy my mind after my mum died because I literally would've gone back to jail... I stayed in the house and put myself on a course and just focused on that ... But with my criminal record⁷⁶ I've got a year left before it wipes off ... So, I can't really do anything with it. But I've opened up ... a ... business ... So that's what I'm doing at the moment. I can't do much right now because of [the] corona[virus]. But I've just been focused on that really, and it's helped me. Where I've been focused on that I've managed to stay out of trouble."

Kayla's engagement in education and work (such as setting up her own business) after imprisonment was not necessarily attributed meaning in relation to financial stability for herself or her family, but was largely framed as a means of 'distraction' (from trauma) as well as providing 'purpose' (in the absence of an "routine" following imprisonment). The loss of her mother, as well as her grandmothers, in the years after her release from prison (as explored earlier in her narrative) had placed further strain on her mental wellbeing. Studying towards her educational diplomas as well as setting up her business had thus acted as a 'distraction'

⁷⁶ It is important to note here that, given women who are racialised as 'non-White' are more likely to receive longer prison sentences than the national average, their criminal records endure for longer and so are more likely to impact their pathways into employment for extended periods of time following their release (Working Chance 2021).

from the emotional pain she was experiencing as a daughter who had lost the maternal women in her life. Using paid work as a means of 'distraction' in the absence of mothering relationships was also apparent within Joy's narrative. However, Joy's experience related to an engagement in paid work *during* imprisonment rather than *after*. Whilst previously imprisoned, Joy described having to work full-time within the kitchen "to make [her] time go" faster to cope with the separation from her son so that she wouldn't get "distracted" by the pain. In keeping with Reynolds (2001) argument, therefore, it is necessary to conceptualise 'work' as something closely connected to - rather than separate from - experiences of Black motherhood and daughterhood.

As noted previously, Chante was the only mother I spoke with who had been remanded for six-months and then released from prison after being found not guilty. Sharing her experience of "restart[ing]" and "settle[ing] back in", she stated:

"I was able to go back to my old home, my old job, my uni. I think the midwife - because when I got in she was like 'Is everything okay?' and I was like 'Yes' - I think it was more worrying. Because she asked me if everything was okay, I said 'Yes', and she didn't believe me, so she made a referral to social services. When the social worker popped up, she said it's the first time that she's visited someone whose come from prison and I'm so together."

In this section of her narrative Chante draws upon her engagement in paid work, university and being able to move back to her own home as a means of illustrating her 'togetherness' and 'functionality' as a mother – and she utilised the social worker's comment as validation of this. It is also necessary to highlight, that whilst Chante described being able to "restart and settle back in" to her "old home", "job" and "uni", earlier in her narrative she had also discussed having to navigate several barriers to be in the position she was in at the time of when I spoke with her:

"When I was going to go back, they were trying to bar me from the [university] because I had committed an offence and I was like 'Nah I was acquitted' ... I felt like I was constantly disputing with the uni before I was allowed back ... But luckily it worked."

Chante's narrative demonstrates the disruptive impact that being remanded within prison continued to have on her access to, and treatment within, higher education and

employment, aspects of her life to which she attributed great importance and constructed as being closely connected to motherhood, as discussed above. It is necessary to acknowledge that Chante constructed her ability to continue on her course, and to return to her old job, as being dependent on her being acquitted and thus not having a criminal record, emphasising the increased social stigma and discrimination experienced by those with criminal convictions (see Working Chance 2021). The mothers' experiences of rebuilding life after release can therefore be seen as closely intertwined with, and a continuation of, their experiences of marginalisation within the women's prisons estate. Whilst this section has largely centred on access to, and experiences within, paid work and education, in the next section I consider the 'Activist Motherwork' that was also seen to define some of the mothers' experiences after release.

7.4 Activist Mothering

Community or activist mothering (see section 2.3) encompasses the work done by Black women to nurture the "survival", "empowerment" and "identity" of their communities both in the present and/or for future generations (Collins 1994:374). Such work is often a necessary "response to racism" (Erel and Reynolds 2018:8) as well as other forms of harm which are engrained within, and spread across, many social structures (Collins 1994; Reynolds 2005). Within this thesis, such work has also been argued to reveal wider processes of 'responsibilisation' that result in Black women doing the work to care for, and protect, their families and communities in the absence of formal care and protection from the state.

Since their release from prison, the mothers discussed being either involved in, or wanting to be involved in, paid and voluntary work, as well as participating in or facilitating research that challenged systematic injustices and structural disadvantage within the prison system, perinatal healthcare services and their wider communities as well as supporting those currently experiencing maternal imprisonment, women's imprisonment and processes of criminalisation within society. In this thesis, I conceptualise the work done by Black mothers as forms of "activist mothering" (Naples 1992:441) undertaken in response to their own gendered, racialised and classed experiences of oppression within the criminal justice system as well as

other institutional settings throughout their lives – intending to lead to social and/or political change and the empowerment of their communities.

In section 6.3.1, I briefly discussed the disempowerment that Trish faced whilst imprisoned when she was prevented from taking part in a youth mentoring scheme with young people who had grown up in similar circumstances to herself and who “*look[ed] like [her] and spoke like [her] and came from the same kind of experience as [her]*”. However, this disempowerment extended to her experience after her release from prison as she was further prevented from working with children in her community (work she highly valued) due to her criminal record:

“All of the qualifications that I’ve acquired since school are kinda void now but that doesn’t mean that I’m not still gonna be pushing myself.”

At the time of our conversation Trish was working two jobs, one of which was based within a charity that supported imprisoned people and their families:

“What I love is they will come to me and be like ‘Trish you’ve got lived experience, we feel like what you’ve got to say will be better than what we’ve got to say do you wanna take that on?’ Do you know what I mean? The other thing that we done with [The Charity] was literally looking into support for women in prison how - what women felt like in the prison environment. The reason I was so for it was there is still a major failing happening with the ethnic community... I say the ethnic community, but I would say more so Black communities... In the Black community I don’t know [smiles] ... When you ask for things... You were made to feel like ‘Oh you’re not special cuz you’re Black’.”

Collins (1987: 4) argues that although motherhood may be experienced as an “oppressive institution” the “experience of motherhood can provide Black women with a base of self-actualisation, status in the Black community, and a reason for social activism”. Whilst Trish was not able to continue community youth work, therefore, she had found value, empowerment and status in the work she was doing to support women and their families currently experiencing imprisonment. Part of this value was found in the acknowledgment given to her lived experience within this role, as she had been able to use this to highlight and emphasise the differential and unjust treatment of Black women within the prison system.

As briefly mentioned in subsection 4.9.2, many of the mothers who chose to participate in this research identified the sharing of their experiences as a means of resistance. Within her narrative, Joy placed importance on speaking out about, as well as utilising, her past experience of imprisonment in different settings, which included this research project:

“I’m still suffering from the impact of being in prison or what came with it. I’m beginning to be hopeful. I’m trying now to see how I can use my experience to support other people in any little way. So that’s why when I heard about your research, I thought I would speak as a lot of this wasn’t done in the right way. I was discriminated. I had the same sentence with a man. We were arrested the same time. Everything was done together. We were sentenced together and then he was working and going out visiting family outside and I was denied that from day one.”

Reynolds (2020:7) argues that whilst this type of “community” or, as I have chosen to describe it, *activist* mothering “may not directly transform [mothers] material and economic circumstances... it does reflect an important strategy for civic engagement”. Joy’s engagement in this “*research*”, like many of the mothers I spoke with, can be seen as a constituent act of activism, as through sharing her experiences of discrimination, she was able to contribute to discourses challenging current contexts of imprisonment to advocate for the better treatment of mothers, and especially Black mothers also categorised as ‘foreign nationals’ within the prison system. For Joy, therefore, taking part in research as well as other paid work relating to the imprisonment of mothers became a means of advocating for - and being involved in creating - social change.

All of the mothers’ engagement with activist mothering after their release from prison appeared to be underpinned by a desire – or a feeling of responsibility - to protect other Black women and children from having similar experiences to themselves. Whilst imprisoned, for example, Chante had experienced a pregnancy “*scare*” that appeared to be connected to her ‘Activist Motherwork’ after release:

“Imagine I was faking that I had pains because I just wanted to come out of my cell for a walk and then they took me to the hospital and all this blood started rushing down my leg... [The officers] did not want to stay at the hospital. Not only are you handcuffed when you get there too, which was also very wild because people stare They just wanted to go home, and they were saying in the car ‘If it’s not meant to be it’s not meant to be’ and that’s not really what you want to hear ... I felt like they lacked

empathy, they were rude and very intrusive.... The stuff they had to say on the way home from the hospital. They were so relieved I was discharged so they didn't have to stay... They were like 'Oh I have places to be' and I was like 'really, really?'... They were saying their shift was ending and they wanted to get out, so that was upsetting. They were blaming me for inconveniencing their evening ... But he was fine, thank God."

Her narrative depicted the prison as a site of anxiety, intrusion and danger for pregnant women, and this had extended into the community during her hospital visits where she was still “handcuffed” and bound by the nature of imprisonment physically, legally and psychologically (see also Abbott 2018). The anxiety she felt during her pregnancy scare, an experience that would be deeply distressing for any mother, was intensified by her knowledge of the death of a baby in a prison in England. The prison was thus understood as a site of potential harm and violence to her baby and her description of the officers downplaying of her situation also represents how the pain of pregnant Black women is often dismissed and invalidated (see also MBRRACE-UK 2020). Consequently, after her release, Chante had since been involved in an “audit” looking into the reasoning behind the differential experiences of Black mothers during pregnancy and childbirth:

“...We're looking at why we're getting different care because when we was looking at the figures⁷⁷ it was just like wow. Even like a normal birthing experience before I became a prisoner, the first time wasn't great either. So not very shocked.”

For previously imprisoned Black mothers, activist mothering was therefore not necessarily centred around challenging injustice solely in relation to maternal imprisonment and the criminal justice system but also wider racialised and social inequalities which existed outside of the prison estate and shaped experiences in the community.

7.5 Concluding Thoughts

For many of the mothers I spoke with, their expectations and experiences of life after being imprisoned within the women's prisons estate were defined by further experiences of marginalisation under continued state surveillance and control, extended barriers to autonomy, as well as the societal stigma surrounding their imprisonment. Importantly, this

⁷⁷ A report by MBRRACE (2020) found that maternal mortality rates are four times higher amongst Black mothers than White mothers as a result of systematic racism within perinatal healthcare.

chapter has thus illustrated how the mothers' experiences of marginalisation were often situated at the intersections of many interlocking systems, such as criminal justice, immigration, local authority care, housing, education and employment. This emphasises the importance of recognising the wider social, political and racialised contexts of oppression in which Black mothers with experiences of imprisonment must navigate their lives in the wider community. For significant social change to take place, therefore, processes of marginalisation must be challenged at a societal level - right down to their roots (see Davis 1989;2003a) - in acknowledgment of the ways in which institutions such as the prison reflect, reproduce and exacerbate (rather than address) wider processes of structural harm for Black mothers, their families and wider communities.

Notions of 'rebuilding' were also prevalent throughout the mothers' narratives as active strategies for mitigating against the disruptive and spoiling nature of imprisonment. In this sense, 'Rebuilding Motherwork' was discussed by the mothers in relation to re-establishing a sense of home and belonging for themselves and their families, their relationships (such as with children, their own mothers and friends), their financial security/status through education and employment as well as the building of a safer society for themselves, their children and their communities. Consequently, for Black mothers post-release, 'Rebuilding Motherwork' was often positioned as being closely connected to strategies of 'Protective' and 'Activist Motherwork', emphasising the overlapping and intertwined nature of the different types of motherwork presented in this thesis.

However, it is also acknowledged that the types of motherwork discussed in this chapter also illustrates how the mothers were often made to feel personally responsible for mitigating against further harm to themselves, their children and communities in response to the continuation of state-oppression after their release. This heightened sense of responsibility has been conceptualised in this thesis as the 'responsibilisation' of Black mothers and this chapter has further evidenced how the projected and internalised expectations of strength, resilience and independence that surround constructions of Black femininity and mothering (Collins 1990; Reynolds 1997; Aniefuna et al 2020) appeared to shape such work, as well as the absence support, care and protection from the state.

Utilising Collins (1987) concept of motherwork as a framework, I have also illustrated the importance of acknowledging a wider context of mothering and motherhood within prisons literature that does not just focus on direct mother-child interactions, but all aspects of a mother's life which she lived experiences of herself, her family and her community. It is through this discussion of the far-reaching consequences of imprisonment, and its disproportionate impact on Black mothers and their families, that I have found myself returning to abolitionist and feminist abolitionist literature. In acknowledgment of the racialisation of punishment (Davis 2003b), as well as the pervasive harm that prisons cause individuals, families and communities, abolitionist perspectives advocate for the dismantling of criminal justice systems that exacerbate racialised as well as other forms of inequality whilst doing very little to address the root causes of harm and violence in society (Carlen 2002a; Davis 2003a; Scraton and Carlton 2017; Kaba 2021; Davis et al 2022).

Rather than address processes of economic marginalisation that had led to the criminalisation of *some* of the mothers, for example, prison had instead resulted in many of them losing their homes, losing their jobs and being prevented from finding work due to their criminal records further exacerbating social inequality for themselves, their children and their families. Abolition thus emphasises the importance of reimagining social systems such as education, healthcare, immigration, employment and housing as a means of addressing processes of structural oppression and domination that exist at the systemic level to increase social safety, security and care for society as a whole (Davis 2003a; Davis et al 2022). A justice framework focused on reconciliation and reparation *within the community* would then provide an opportunity to hold people accountable in ways that are no longer tied to harm and isolation and do not result in the intergenerational trauma highlighted in this thesis (see Kaba 2021).

Chapter Eight

Concluding Discussion

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I provide the concluding discussion for this thesis. Within this discussion, I provide a short summary of the research. I then go on to highlight the main findings and the key contributions to knowledge produced in this thesis, as well as acknowledging its limitations and areas for future research. Specific attention is then given to recommendations for policy and practice. As guided by my research findings, which has promoted reflection upon the use of imprisonment, I have then chosen to end this thesis with a reflective discussion regarding a potential move *towards* abolition.

8.2 Research Summary

Whilst it has been acknowledged that Black imprisoned mothers in England are likely to face “distinct and discrete difficulties” (Farmer 2019:8), there has not been any research that has solely centred their experiences. For my doctoral research, I have actively listened to, represented, and interpreted the narrated experiences of Black mothers during and after their imprisonment in the women’s prisons estate in England and have challenged their historical marginalisation in dominant discourses surrounding mothering and imprisonment. Guided by a Black feminist approach to narrative analysis (see section 4.11), I have discussed how imprisonment, either experienced through remand before trial or a custodial sentence upon conviction, is felt to restrict and redefine Black mothering identities and experiences, due to the inaccessibility of desired mothering activities and relationships, as well as cause emotional harm to both mothers and their children. I have also explored how, from the mothers’ perspectives, wider mothering networks are strained and redefined by imprisonment with emphasis placed on the ways in which family members negotiate *mothering in the mothers’ physical absence* whilst also becoming potentially exposed to intervention by the state.

I have considered in-depth how complex processes of racialisation and racism shape Black mothers’ experiences during imprisonment. Not only are Black women disproportionately sentenced to imprisonment and are likely to receive lengthy custodial sentences (Cardale et al

2017; Ministry of Justice 2022), arguably as a result of racially disproportionate policing and sentencing practices (Chigwada-Bailey 1989; Uhrig 2016), mothers who had experienced racism whilst imprisoned, often described it as a painful barrier to their “progression” through the system itself. Such barriers are found to result in what I have termed as ‘*stretched*’ (concerning British mothers) and ‘*sticky*’ (concerning non-British citizen mothers) concepts of time. I argue that the feeling of time being stretched or sticky, meaning it is hard to move through the system and ‘progress’ to ROTL, open conditions and eventual release, has consequences for Black motherhood and the result is intensified feelings and experiences of ‘*missed time*’ with their children (see also section 3.12). These experiences of racism were often narrated as being intersected with marginalisation relating to skin tone, gender, nationality and class. For Black mothers, therefore, racism is entangled with and inseparable from other injustices that maintain social and political hierarchies (see also Crenshaw 1991).

I have also discussed Black mothers’ expectations and experiences of life after imprisonment and explored how marginalisation during imprisonment is often exacerbated following release, as reflected in barriers to housing and employment (shaped by sexism, racism and criminalisation) as well as threats of deportation (shaped by crimmigration policies). Importantly I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, how Black mothers and their families purposefully engage in different types of “motherwork” to mitigate the reproductive oppression and racialised harm caused by imprisonment, and to ensure the “survival”, “empowerment” and the nurturing of “identity” for themselves, their children and their communities (Collins 1994:374). However, I conclude that whilst these strategies show the strength and *resilience* of Black mothers and Black mothering networks, they also reveal processes of ‘responsibilisation’ that position Black mothers, their families and communities as needing to care for themselves in the absence of support from the state and in the face of disproportionate imprisonment. The following section expands upon these arguments in more detail in light of this thesis’ main findings and key contributions to knowledge.

8.3 Main Findings and Key Contributions to Knowledge

In this section, I address my first two research questions: *'In what ways do Black mothers narrate their experiences of imprisonment?'* and *'In what ways do Black mothers narrate their expectations, experiences and hopes of life after release from prison?'* (see section 3.13), by outlining the main findings and key contributions to knowledge produced in this thesis. I closely consider the ways in which experiences of imprisonment, within the women's prisons estate in England, can be seen as a process of state-sanctioned reproductive oppression (see Hayes et al 2020; Cavanagh et al 2022) and racialised injustice (see also Uhrig 2016; Aiyegbusi 2020; Howard League for Penal Reform 2020; IMB and CJA 2022), in keeping with my adoption of an abolitionist argument. I highlight how these forms of oppression are often experienced as extending into the community after release and reflect on the particular consequences of this for Black mothers. In this section, I also acknowledge the key contributions to existing academic knowledge produced in this thesis to clearly position its' academic standpoint.

8.3.1 Reproductive Oppression

In keeping with Cavanagh et al's (2022) argument that there is a close connection between abolitionist and reproductive justice frameworks, as both emerge from Black feminist thought and argue against the use of systems of oppression such as the prison that cause harm to women, families and communities, this thesis has further demonstrated how the prison is experienced as a site of reproductive oppression (see also Hayes et al 2020). As discussed in section 3.8, reproductive justice relies on women's ability to have bodily autonomy and be able to *access* and *choose* safe spaces for mothering. Within all the mothers' narratives, imprisonment caused significant harm to themselves, their children, families, and communities and had thus restricted access to reproductive justice (chapters 6, 7 and 8).

Guided by the mothers' narratives, this thesis has detailed extensively the ways in which imprisonment redefines mothering as well as the trauma that results from either experiencing maternal separation or mothering one's baby within the restrictive and oppressive conditions of imprisonment (such as during pregnancy or on an MBU), adding to existing academic literature (see Enos 2001; Abbott and Scott 2017; Baldwin 2019;2021; Booth 2018). The inappropriateness of the prison for mothers is also reflected in Baldwin's (2021:308)

recommendation that pregnant mothers should no longer be sent to prison and MBU's should be based in the community with an emphasis on "support" and "empowerment" instead of confinement.

Woven throughout the mothers' narratives were described experiences of reduced bodily and maternal autonomy, relative powerlessness as well as feelings that prisons were largely unsafe places for children (to visit, reside within or even at times know about), in acknowledgement of the pervasive nature of its oppression and harm. Imprisonment was thus experienced as a site of "reproductive oppression" (Hayes et al 2017: 21), whereby the mothers' bodily autonomy and safety were challenged as well as their ability to mother and experience family life in the ways that they had done before imprisonment - or in which they had desired (Chapter Five). It is also important to note, that for some mothers, these restrictions and harms were felt to have extended to their parental relationships as well as wider familial dynamics demonstrating additional layers of identity loss and strain closely connected to motherhood (sections 5.3, 5.5 5.6).

Feelings of disempowerment, insecurity and instability also characterised many (although not all) of the mothers' post-imprisonment. When considered through the lens of reproductive oppression, such narratives demonstrate the continued constraints on mothering post-release, referred to by Baldwin (2021:2), through her research with mothers more broadly, as the "persistent pains of maternal imprisonment". Chapter Seven detailed how mothering post-release was often constructed within the mothers' narratives as being largely responsive to the disruption caused by imprisonment and many mothers described having to – or anticipating having to - *work* hard to re-establish their mothering relationships and rebuild their homes. However, such experiences often appeared to be shaped by multiple layers of marginalisation (such as racism, financial inequality, classism and immigration policy) within the community (see also Owens 2010; Working Chance 2021).

For example, some of the mothers described experiencing different barriers to housing and employment post-release (section 7.3.1; 7.3.3), and both Annette and Joy detailed personal or vicarious threats of deportation that threatened their motherhood (Joy) and daughterhood (Annette) (section 7.2). Together these narratives demonstrated how intersectional processes

of criminalisation, racism and classed inequality acted to further define many of the mothers' experiences post-release, in addition to their experiences of imprisonment (see also Bosworth 2010). Several of the mothers' narratives also shared concerns regarding their children's safety, protection and future intervention by the state, an anxiety that is arguably exacerbated for Black mothers whose children (if also racialised as Black or Black-mixed-Race) are disproportionately policed and imprisoned (Chapter Seven). Building upon existing theoretical arguments, this thesis thus provides a new understanding of how Black mothers' experiences of reproductive oppression during and after imprisonment in the English prisons estate are seen to be closely linked to wider processes of marginalisation within British society that further challenge and restrict access to reproductive justice. The following section thus highlights how for Black mothers', the painful experiences of reproductive oppression (as experienced by imprisoned mothers more broadly) often intersect with the pains of racialised harm and injustice shaping particular experiences of Black imprisoned motherhood; an argument that is presented in the next subsection.

8.3.2 The [Racialised] Pains of [Maternal] Imprisonment

This thesis contributes to the extensive body of existing academic literature relating to '*the pains of imprisonment*'. As highlighted previously (see section 3.3 and Chapter Six), Sykes (1958) originally coined this phrase as a means of describing how the inherently oppressive nature of 'the prison' inevitably causes harm to those confined within its walls. Since Sykes' (1958) writing, many scholars have drawn upon and expanded his 'pains' framework for conceptualising the pains caused by imprisonment in contemporary societies, as well as how 'pain' may be experienced by particular social groups or within particular social and institutional contexts (see section 3.3). Whilst existing literature has focused separately on the gendered pains of imprisonment (Crewe and Wright 2017; Walker and Worrall 2000), the maternal pains of imprisonment (Baldwin 2021 and Nuytiens and Jahaes 2022), the pains of crimmigration (Warr 2016; Ugelvik and Damsa 2018) and the pains of racism (Phillips 2012) there has not been an in-depth consideration of how these pains may intersect and be experienced through one another. Through centring Black mothers' experiences, this thesis has thus produced a theoretical understanding of some of the interlocking 'pains' that Black mothers face whilst imprisoned and where possible their purposeful strategies for coping with and mitigating against them.

Based on the mothers' narratives, I have identified three main pains which I refer to as: '*The Pains of Marginalisation*', '*The Pains of Discrimination*' and '*The Pains of Appeasement*' (see Chapter Six). It is recognised, however, that as Black mothers' experiences are not homogenous, not all of the mothers experienced these pains and those who did may have experienced them in different ways depending on their personal experiences and individual identities. Nonetheless, together, these pains provide an insight into the ways in which the mothers were made to feel marginalised within the prison system, arguably as a result of the White and masculine institutional standards and expectations underpinning the design of this environment (Chigwada-Bailey 2003), which had resulted in the institutional ignorance of their needs and experiences as Black women.

My discussion relating to these pains also highlights how institutional processes and policies enabled and upheld different types of racialised and gendered discrimination that prevented Black mothers' from being able to access 'privileges' such as enhanced conditions, ROTL and open conditions in the same way that they believed White women had. Additionally, mothers who did have access to such 'privileges' began to self-police their behaviours, self-censor their opinions and repress their emotions to ensure that they were *appeasing* the system, out of fear of losing what they had or impacting their "progression", reflecting Wilson and Moore's (2003) and Warr's (2022) research with imprisoned Black men and boys. The need to appease the system was often underpinned by a feeling that, as Black women, they were more likely to be stereotyped as disobedient, aggressive and deviant resulting in their unfair treatment and a lack of sufficient support. Acts of self-policing and self-censorship were thus closely tied to displays of more submissive and compliant forms of femininity felt to be demanded by the institution as a means of surviving within it.

As highlighted previously (see section 3.5), a focus on intersectionality relies on the understanding that different oppressions are felt through – rather than on top – of one another (Crenshaw 1991). The racialised and gendered pains experienced by Black mothers can therefore be seen as closely intertwined with their identities and experiences as mothers. The mothers' experiences of racialised marginality and discrimination, which at times were also felt by family members during visits, appeared to restrict access to their desired mothering

identities and relationships, as well as their access to necessary institutional support. Not only are Black women more likely to be serving longer custodial sentences than the national average (Ministry of Justice 2020a), resulting in extended periods of maternal separation, but through listening to the mothers' narratives discriminatory practices relating to enhanced regime, work, ROTL, open conditions and release were not only seen as examples of institutional racism, but also as barriers to mothering further exacerbating experiences of separation. I therefore argue that the trauma of racism is thus experienced as being entangled with the trauma of institutional reproductive oppression, again reinforcing the connection between Black feminist reproductive justice and abolitionist arguments (Cavanagh et al 2022).

As failing to appease the system was seen as having severe implications for maternal relationships, acts of self-policing and self-censorship were also rationalised as necessary procurations for protecting access to motherhood and moving more quickly towards child reunification. This thesis has therefore added to the existing pains of imprisonment literature and has highlighted the importance of understanding these experiences using an intersectional lens. Next, I detail how, in response to experiences of reproductive oppression and racialised injustice, many of the mothers' narratives described purposive strategies for mitigating against the disproportionate harms of imprisonment and maintaining relationships with their children and wider families. Such strategies are conceptualised in this thesis as forms of *motherwork* analysed from a perspective deeply rooted in Black feminist thought (section 2.9).

8.3.3 A Typology of Imprisoned Motherwork

In keeping with a Black feminist approach, I have worked closely with Collins' (1994) theoretical concept of 'motherwork' (see section 2.9) throughout this thesis which provides a framework for considering the paid and unpaid labour in which Black mothers often must engage, as a means of ensuring the survival and empowerment of their children, families and wider communities and in response to intersecting processes of marginalisation. To date, whilst the concept of motherwork has been utilised as a theoretical framework for understanding marginalised mothers' experiences across a number of different contexts (see for example Cooper 2007; Gowens with Pottenger 2018) only a very small body of academic literature has utilised it in relation to imprisonment (see Arditti et al 2020; Baldwin 2021; Campos 2016;

Gurusami 2019; Lockwood 2021), with some writings only providing a brief consideration of the term.

Within this imprisonment literature it appears that only Gurusami's (2019) research, focused on mothering after imprisonment in America, draws upon motherwork as a framework for centring the specific experiences of Black mothers, and the strategies used for mothering in the context of disproportionate imprisonment and an increased risk of state surveillance. This thesis has thus further contributed to an understanding of the ways in which motherwork - a concept traditionally rooted in Black feminist theory - is useful for representing Black mothers' experiences of mothering *in* and *after* imprisonment. I have argued that this is particularly important in relation to Black women's overrepresentation within the women's prisons estate in England, as well as the wider intersectional forms of marginalisation that shape experiences of Black mothering in British society more broadly.

Reflecting closely on the mothers' narratives discussed across the three findings chapters, I have developed five broad categories to describe the different types of motherwork that the mothers appeared to engage in before, during and after their imprisonment: 'Preparatory Motherwork', 'Connective Motherwork', 'Protective Motherwork', 'Rebuilding Motherwork' and 'Activist Motherwork', which are outlined in more detail below.

Preparatory Motherwork describes the work done by mothers before or during the initial stages of their imprisonment to ensure the physical and emotional safety of their children. This work includes moving their children into their new caregivers' homes during the trial, deciding caregiving arrangements with family members, advocating for culturally matched foster placements, and talking to their children about what to expect.

Connective Motherwork refers to the strategies used during imprisonment to maintain an emotional connection to children and family (such as paid labour to pay for phone calls and travel, speaking on the phone, canerowing hair, doing homework packs, family day visits, advocating for inter-prison visits).

Protective Motherwork is an expanded definition of Gurusami's (2019) concept of 'hypervigilant motherwork' that may take place after release in response to continued state intervention or threats of violence in the community (such as through a focus on discipline, education and close surveillance). However, this also includes the work done by Black mothers during their sentence to keep children safe from the harm of imprisonment itself (such as not having visits with children or grandchildren whilst imprisoned, not disclosing imprisonment to children, modifying behaviour to reduce the likelihood of intervention by the prison system).

Rebuilding Motherwork details the paid and unpaid work done by Black mothers after their release to reconnect with their children but also gain a sense of stability in their lives more broadly.

Finally, *Activist Motherwork*, which aligns closely with existing literature relating to Black mothering more broadly (see Collins 1990; Naples 1992; Reynolds 2005; Corely and Raheem 2019), reflects the work done by Black mothers during and after imprisonment to nurture and work towards social and racial justice within society for themselves, their children and their communities.

Together these categories have contributed to the development of an original typology of imprisoned motherwork. This typology provides a new strategy for classifying and representing the different forms of 'mothering' that Black mothers often engage in during and after imprisonment. However, it is important to emphasise that the different categories that formulate this typology are not necessarily seen as distinct from one another and thus may overlap and intertwine. Additionally, it is not intended that this typology be used as a 'fixed' measure to 'determine' approaches to mothering during and after imprisonment. Rather, it is a fluid representation of the different forms of mothering utilised by the mothers whose narratives are presented in this thesis, and thus it is expected to be re-worked, adjusted and expanded in response to different social contexts as well as individual perceptions and experiences.

Importantly, throughout this thesis I have also discussed the ways in which certain types of motherwork may become rendered inaccessible because of the restrictive nature of

imprisonment as well as its intersecting relationship with racialised, classed, gendered and sexuality injustices. I have also acknowledged how, in response to imprisonment, wider mothering networks often take on existing - or create new forms - of motherwork. Representations of *familial togetherness* can thus be understood as a purposive response to the trauma of imprisonment, reproductive oppression and racialised injustice - and as necessary strategies for survival, in keeping with wider academic literature relating to collective motherwork within Black communities as a response to disproportionate state intervention and harm (see Collins 1994; Gurusami 2019).

In summary therefore, the concept of motherwork developed by Collins (1994) provides an appropriate framework for recognising the purposeful strategies developed by Black mothers and their families for mothering in response to the harms of disproportionate imprisonment, which challenges existing stereotypes of the uncaring and unfit Black [and imprisoned] mother (see section 2.7). However, it is also necessary to stress that motherwork is often a necessary response to the reproductive oppressions and racialised injustices experienced by Black mothers, so as to not romanticise or decontextualise such *work* (Collins 1994), and as explored in the next subsection.

8.3.4 Responsibilisation

Although many of the mothers' narratives portrayed a sense of resilience and strength, I would also argue they reflected racialised and gendered processes of 'responsibilisation' (see section 1.9) experienced by Black women and their families. As discussed in Chapter 2, Black women have historically been socialised to be "strong, independent, resilient, self-reliant, and to hide pain and vulnerability" but have also been negatively stereotyped within society as "loud and aggressive, emasculating and disgustingly independent" (Overstreet 2019:19). As a result, Black mothers often become positioned as responsible for caring for themselves, their children and communities without adequate protection from the state whilst also having to protect themselves against the everyday racisms and wider processes of structural oppression which act to devalue and delegitimise Black mothering identities (Collins 1990; Reynolds 1997; Overstreet 2019; Aniefuna et al 2020). Within this thesis therefore, I have used the term 'responsibilisation' to highlight the multiple ways that the mothers positioned themselves as individually responsible for mitigating the harms of imprisonment – and their marginalisation

within society more broadly – in direct response to the absence of appropriate care, recognition and protection from social institutions and the state.

Whilst the mothers found moments of joy and pride in their strategies for mothering, and appeared to highly value more general attributes of independence and self-reliance, their narratives highlighted how such strategies were often necessary responses to feeling *overlooked* (such as not having access to appropriate services due to institutional neglect or not being given correct information), *over-surveilled* (for example, being watched by staff with more scrutiny thus increasing the threat of intervention) and *misjudged* (for example, feeling as though ones emotional needs may be misinterpreted as ‘aggressive’, ‘inappropriate’ or as evidence of ‘not coping’ by staff, resulting in punishment rather than support).

In response to being overlooked, over-surveilled and misjudged, many of the mothers described having to take on the responsibility of learning about legal rights, institutional regulations and relevant support agencies through independent research, family and friends or from other imprisoned women - referred to by Chante as the “*Know your rights gang*” - and as having to “*fight*” (Malika) to be heard (see also Abbott 2018). However, recognition was given within the mothers’ narratives to particular charities (such as Birth Companions, The Hardman Trust and Pact) and members of staff who were trustworthy and supportive, although this was often represented at an individual organisational rather than institutional level. The mothers’ narratives of resilience (through the stressing of their personal initiative, determination and strength) therefore provided an insight into the ways in which they had actively resisted their disempowerment within the prison system and mitigated against the institutional neglect and harm they had faced. Such narratives also highlighted the value the mothers placed on opportunities for self-empowerment, arguably reflecting the social expectation often placed on Black mothers to demonstrate perseverance in the absence of adequate social support (see section 2.7 and 2.8).

Across the narratives, there was also an overarching sense that some mothers felt a responsibility to repress their true emotions and vulnerabilities to abide by the expectations of the institution (see also Wilson and Moore 2003; Crewe 2011) and protect themselves and their children from further state-intervention. I am thus conscious that the institutional

burdens experienced by Black mothers before, during and after imprisonment run the risk of becoming disguised beneath one-dimensional discourses of resilience (see also Aniefuna et al 2020), reproducing the notion of the ‘super strong Black mother’ (see section 2.7.2) who is presumed to cope in the face of adversity and thus not require institutional support as she can “*crack on by [herself]*” (Sharon). Such assumptions have resulted in severe consequences for Black mothers such as Sarah Reed (see section 3.5) and Annabella Landsberg (see Thomas and Bozkurt, forthcoming) whose deaths have since been attributed to serious “institutional failures” (Inquest 2019: para 1) and “delays in care” (Inquest 2017: para 1).

Nonetheless, many of the mothers I spoke to after their imprisonment had found pride, joy and purpose in the ‘Activist Motherwork’ they were engaging with in the community, where they were able to create - or advocate for - spaces where mothers and families with similar experiences to themselves would be better supported (section 7.4). ‘Activist Motherwork’ has thus not only been constructed in this thesis as a process of empowerment but also a means of purposefully nurturing and caring for communities who may otherwise be overlooked and ignored under the guise of their presumed resilience or un-deservingness - through voluntary and paid work as well as facilitating or participating in research (see also Collins 1990;1994). ‘Activist Motherwork’ is thus an act of resilience and resistance, in response to marginalisation, and is deeply rooted in feelings of *responsibility*, *care* and the necessary imagining of new worlds.

This thesis has thus purposefully represented the complex and multifaceted nature of Black mothers’ experiences. It has not only emphasised narratives of *resilience* and strength - which are vitally important - but has also acknowledged how such narratives may also be underpinned by processes of marginalisation that leave Black mothers *responsible* for caring for and ensuring the safety of themselves, their children and their communities. For example, in keeping with existing Black feminist arguments, narratives of resistance and resilience are recognised in this thesis as purposeful and strategic responses to experiences of socio-structural oppression and the state’s historical lack of responsibility over the protection and care of Black mothers and their children (see also Aniefuna et al 2020; Overstreet 2019; Reynolds 1997; Collins 1990). This thesis thus contributes a nuanced understanding of how

particular processes of marginalisation experienced by Black mothers in society more broadly, come to be closely reflected in Black mothers' narratives in and after imprisonment.

In summary, these subsections have detailed the main theoretical findings and key contributions to knowledge produced in this thesis. In the following subsection I highlight how this thesis also makes a key contribution to the discipline of Black feminist criminology more broadly.

8.3.5 Black Feminist Criminology

In terms of methodological as well as theoretical contributions, this thesis makes a substantial contribution to the growing field of Black feminist criminological research (see also Potter 2006; Patterson et al 2016; Angton 2017; Choak 2020; Monde 2022). Black feminist criminology challenges existing criminological discourses which often marginalise Black women as it is recognised that feminist criminological discourses have often overlooked processes of racialisation (in relation to all women, as *all* women are racialised) and critical race criminological discourses often centre the experiences of Black men; resulting in Black women being overlooked (Agozino 1997; Choak 2020). In relation to British Criminology more broadly, Parmar (2016) observes how there has been an historical institutional reluctance to discuss race and racism and engage closely with Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality. Through centring Black mothers' narratives, this thesis thus contributes to an understanding of the ways in which constructions of race, skin-tone, gender, class, and nationality (as well as other intersecting factors) come to be experienced through one another and shape experiences of mothering during and after imprisonment.

Importantly, Black feminist research more generally places importance on methodology, with close attention given to how personal histories, immediate environments, researcher' positionality, researcher-participant dynamics, as well as wider social and political processes come to shape the research process (see sections 4.2.2, 4.10 and 4.10). This thesis has therefore demonstrated how such considerations can and should be acknowledged within Black feminist criminological research. Through acknowledging my presence within the research process, I have represented myself as *human* and not an objective scientific tool with no subjective thoughts, feelings and understandings. This *humanness* is essential for

conducting Black feminist criminological research which necessitates compassion and care at every stage of the research process.

Additionally, by focusing on immediate research environments and wider situational contexts, this research has added to and provided new understandings of how *narratives* come to be inevitably shaped by, and responsive to, different social and temporal dynamics experienced by both the teller and listener (see Chapter Four). Emphasis in this thesis has thus been placed on acknowledging the situational impacts of racialisation and racism within the production of narrative. Writing such processes and dynamics into the research findings, and not just reflecting upon them within the methodology chapter, also demonstrates how such considerations can be utilised as findings in and of themselves (see for example section 6.4.3). Continuing to think about my research process, I consider some of the limitations of this study and provide some suggestions for further research in the next section.

8.4 Research Limitations

In their ethical approval letter, the National Research Committee (NRC) for the prison and probation service stated that they considered it imperative for this research to detail the experiences of Black mothers' experiences relating to MBUs (see appendix three). However, as detailed extensively in Chapter Four, I was not able to attend my scheduled visit to Scarlet Oak, a prison with a MBU, because of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions on prison research. If I had been able to speak with Black mothers imprisoned within Scarlet Oak, I may have been able to develop a further understanding of Black mothers' experiences on the MBU itself as well as how the MBU was perceived by other Black mothers who had perhaps not wanted to enter, or who had been rejected from, this space within the prison. Nonetheless, in sections 5.5 and 7.4 I have foregrounded Chante, Joy and Kayla's perspectives, thoughts and feelings relating to perinatal care and MBUs in prisons.

Another consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic were the difficulties I faced with recruitment, resulting in a relatively small number of mothers taking part in the research (see subsection 4.4.2). It is however acknowledged that qualitative research does not require large sample sizes as the goal is not generalisability, but rather the detailed and nuanced representation of

particular experiences (Sandelowski 1995). Nevertheless, I had originally set out to speak with around 20 mothers as I felt that this would ensure my research reflected the diverse and multifaceted nature of Black mothers' experiences of imprisonment, with emphasis placed on personal and unique experiences as well as shared ones. However, despite only speaking with a small group of mothers, the diverse nature of experience was still represented through the differing social, aged, cultural, educational, sexual and classed identities of the mothers who chose to take part in the research. Furthermore, engaging closely with a small number of narratives (that being nine) facilitated a more in-depth and detailed analysis.

This research is also restricted by its' *somewhat* marginal emphasis on '*after prison*' narratives. As an emphasis on life after prison was introduced later in the research process, in light of the restrictions on prisons research, I did not navigate detailed discussions about life after prison with all of the mothers I spoke with at Greenhill, although some mothers did share with me their imagined and hoped for futures. Consequently, the research is somewhat limited in providing a detailed understanding of currently imprisoned Black mothers' *desires* and *expectations* for their lives after release, although it does provide a more detailed understanding of Black mothers lived experiences of life *following* their release.

When initially developing the research design for this thesis in 2018, I had not yet been introduced to scholars who had incorporated art, music, poetry and theatre alongside theory, history and politics into their criminological research; approaches which enable more expansive and inclusive opportunities for storytelling, knowledge production and knowledge sharing (see Phillips et al 2020; Chivandikwa et al 2020; Glynn 2021; Whitecross 2021a;2021b). This thesis is therefore limited by its' '*somewhat*' more conventionalist approach to PhD research and subsequent presentation. In the future, therefore, I plan to engage more closely with creative criminological approaches that provide space to move beyond the limits of the current Criminological canon and towards a Criminology deeply rooted in co-production, community activism and open *and* accessible knowledge dissemination (Phillips et al 2020; Glynn 2021). In light of these reflections, I propose some ideas for further research in the section that follows.

8.5 Recommendations for Future Research

My recommendations for future academic research are as follows:

1. A more in-depth consideration of Black mothers' perinatal care

In accordance with the NRC's suggestion for this research, a research project focused specifically on Black mothers' perinatal care experiences is essential for further developing appropriate policies and practice to support such women. This is especially important in light of recent research that has drawn attention to the health inequalities experienced by Black women and their children in perinatal care (MBRRACE-UK 2020). It would also be important for such research to engage with prison and healthcare staff (across prison and healthcare sectors) to develop a better understanding of the perspectives of professionals responsible for delivering such care and exploring the processes and practices which perpetuate healthcare inequality.

2. Further consideration of 'life after imprisonment'

Whilst this thesis has considered both experiences during and after imprisonment, future research should further consider Black mothers' experiences of transitioning from prison through-the-gate into the community. Closer emphasis could be paid on Black mothers' experiences of probation and extended surveillance from the state post-release, as well as working more closely with services currently providing support to Black mothers in the community. This research has highlighted the importance of acknowledging the resettlement experiences of 'non-British' citizens who have seemingly been repeatedly overlooked within such conversations. Ensuring non-British citizens are included in strategies, policies and practices relating to life after prison, and have access to relevant support, is thus essential and this could be shaped through more participatory studies.

3. A more in-depth consideration of familial experiences

Whilst this research has centred Black mothers' experiences of mothering during imprisonment, it has considered the impact of imprisonment on different familial dynamics such as daughterhood, siblinghood and romantic relationships. It has also emphasised how imprisonment redefines wider familial networks and relationships, not only regarding the

custodial sentences served by the mothers I spoke with, but also, in some incidences, in relation to the sentences served by their family members (such as partners or parents) (see also Sudbury 2005). Black feminism encourages us to focus not only on Black women but also Black men, children, families and communities (Morgan 1999), adopting a family centred approach for future research may thus provide an important insight into the intergenerational consequences of imprisonment necessary for better supporting mothers and their families.

8.6 Recommendations for Policy and Practice

8.6.1 *Centring the Mothers' Perspectives*

Guided by the final research question: *'From the perspective of Black mothers, what changes to current policy and practice could better support mothers currently or previously imprisoned in the women's prison estate?'* this section centres the mothers' perspectives, whose narratives have guided this thesis, to ensure that the recommended changes to policy and practice clearly reflect their personal thoughts, feelings and ideas. The specific recommendations put forward by the mothers reflected four main areas, that being: 'Knowledge and Information', 'Staff and Support', 'Parental Relationships' and 'Community Support', as explored in further detail below.

1. *Knowledge and Information*

Within the criminal justice system, having an awareness of one's legal and institutional rights, the rules, regulations and processes which characterise the system as well as the support that is, or should be, provided by the prison, healthcare or external agencies is of paramount importance (see also Abbott 2018). However, as highlighted by Sharon: *"A lot of the girls don't know about the help that can be accessible"* and as emphasised further by Joy: *"I didn't know my rights. I didn't know nothing. I just like was put in the van, [then] in front of the judge"*. Consequently, Chante recommended there should be *"A kind of like a booklet on knowing your rights... A booklet on what you're entitled to - when and what you can expect. Like real reality checks and making sure people aren't blindsided"*. Birth Companions (2020) have developed a booklet titled 'Your inside guide to pregnancy, birth and motherhood in prison' and Pact (2020) have a resource titled 'Mums the word: A guide to being a mum in prison' both of which provide extensive information for imprisoned mothers and *all* women entering the prisons

estate should have access to such resources. There should also be more accessible options for women and mothers who are not able to read or interpret the information in these quite extensive text-based booklets, perhaps by breaking down the information into smaller parts, providing the information in different languages and providing space for someone to support the reading and interpretation of the documents.

Additionally, in their evaluative report of the ‘Together a Chance’ initiative, that has seen on-site social workers based within two women’s prisons, Rees et al (2022) have recommended that social workers create information sheets and deliver training to prison staff to support their knowledge regarding the rights of mothers, emphasising the importance of knowledge and information for both women who are imprisoned and staff. However, as stressed in this thesis, misinformation, or limited *accessible* information ‘on the ground’, not only relates to mothering rights but also legal rights more broadly; the institutional requirements for responding to racism⁷⁸; the rights of women classified as ‘foreign nationals’ (see Hibiscus who support women at the intersections of the criminal justice and immigration systems); and relevant services both in prison and in the community that are accessible to Black mothers and their families. It is therefore recommended that there are more accessible avenues available for mothers to access useful, relevant and readable information-based-resources which reflect the multiple identities of imprisoned women. There must also be safer, more transparent and effective processes for responding to racism and injustice, perhaps that are monitored independently outside of the prison system, so that women feel able to report their experiences and trust that their reports will be listened and responded to.

⁷⁸ There is a formal ‘Ensuring Equality PSI [Prison Service Instruction] 32/2011’ which outlines how “prisons should work to ensure fair and equal treatment of all prisoners and visitors” (HM Prison and Probation Service 2020:np) and a formal ‘Prisoner complaints policy framework’ which “sets out requirements and information on providing a fair and effective system for dealing with prisoner complaints, including by ensuring procedural justice” (Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service 2019:np). Although such policy exists, many of the mothers did not report their experiences of racism to staff and those who did felt as though they were often ignored and “*brushed off*” (Trish) evidencing a disconnect between policy and practice. It is also necessary to emphasise here, how this disconnect further supports abolitionist debates that argue the prison system can never be fully ‘equal’ or ‘fair’ as it is an inherently repressive space rooted in multiple forms of oppression (see Davis 2003b). Whilst arguing for more accountability within the current system, therefore, we must also advocate for new systems of justice that do not widen and perpetuate inequality.

2. Staff and Support

Similarly, to recommending increased avenues for information distribution, recommendations were also made by the mothers for having specialist staff, agencies and avenues for support based within the prison environment as well as in the community. For example, Chante felt there should “*Be a physical birthing companion alongside having a midwife in every prison, on the mother and baby unit and supporting pregnant peoples’ experiences*”. In her narrative, Chante described how Birth Companions had ensured she was aware of her rights as a pregnant mother and provided necessary emotional and physical support. Ensuring there is funding for Birth companions as well as midwives to be based on-site within *all* women’s prisons would enable mothers to have continuous and ongoing support from services they trust as well as increased perinatal safety.

Whilst Birth Companions are a community led organisation who provide support to marginalised mothers in prisons, detention and the community they also provide support to women by actively campaigning for the rights of imprisoned mothers and their children (Birth Companions 2021). They have been involved in challenging the government’s pledge to build 500 more prison spaces for women, counteracting narratives that support prison expansion and the imprisonment of mothers (Birth Companions 2021). Whilst this thesis supports Chante’s recommendation that currently imprisoned mothers must have access to quality support it simultaneously challenges the appropriateness of imprisonment for mothers in the first place (see also Baldwin 2021), as discussed in more detail later in this section.

Importantly, in light of structural racism within perinatal healthcare (see sections 3.8 and 7.4) it is also imperative that staff in prison and in the community can (and are trained to) actively listen to the needs of Black women, acknowledge the “experiences and expertise of Black women and their families”, separate their delivery of care from racist assumptions in modern medicine, “replace white supremacy and patriarchy with a new care model” and “empower all patients with health literacy and autonomy” as it is acknowledged that “access does not equal quality care” (Scott et al 2019:112). It is therefore not enough to advocate for access to support when the quality of support is not always equal for Black women. Racism thus needs to be addressed at a societal level to ensure *all* Black mothers can access quality perinatal care.

In relation to other staff, Annette stated: *“I personally think on the outside more needs to be done from social services so – whether it’s recruiting more social workers to deal with the caseloads, or whatever it may be, I just don’t think they do enough on the outside”*. The Together a Chance initiative that is currently piloting the effectiveness of implementing on-site social workers within the women’s prisons estate has been argued to better support mothers with social service involvement as they act as “conduit of information, facilitating contact between mothers and community practitioners, mothers and courts, and mothers and children” and support mothers in attending and navigating relevant meetings and family court proceedings (Rees et al 2022:4). However, emphasis must also be placed on addressing Black mothers’ experiences of racism in relation to social services, as discussed in sections 3.8 and 5.3.2.

Trish also expressed: *“As a Black woman you’re - you’re [pause]- Support is not there. The understanding is not there”*. She noted how she felt that women from other racialised backgrounds often had staff who could relate to their needs, something she felt was missing within *“the Black community”*. Whilst this thesis does not advocate for the recruitment of more Black prison officers as increased staff ‘diversity’ is not necessarily an independent indicator of systematic change, it does seem that for many of the mothers, who were often more trusting of support staff and third sector organisations, that being able to speak with and develop connections with people who understood their specific needs or who were culturally familiar to themselves was very important. Closer working with third sector organisations that are appropriate and accessible to Black mothers and families is therefore necessary to ensure that their needs are being met and that they can access relevant information as well as avenues for challenging racism in safe ways. Furthermore, as discussed in section 6.2, having opportunities to advocate for the better nurturing and empowerment of Black imprisoned women was also important to many of the mothers. Ensuring that there are continued and better supported avenues for such conversations and actions to take place amongst Black women, whilst also ensuring their safety, is thus imperative.

3. Parental Relationships

Malika recommended: *“I think if the prison service wants to help more mothers and parents, I think they should help them by facilitating travel and so forth and helping parents financially”*.

Providing financial bursaries for families experiencing imprisonment will therefore prevent barriers to contact experienced because of financial inequality. Additionally, Linda stated: *“There needs to be some kind of charity or organisation that female ladies can talk to, even the males to turn to... They could bring kids up to [the prison] get a little van. Something needs to be organised along them lines to help women in prison to see their children, you know? Where they could all book on one Saturday ... even if it’s only five kids they’re bringing up. At least those five women can see their kids. You know, cuz some people don’t get to see their kids at all.”*

Linda’s recommendation reflects the scheme ‘Visiting Mum’ run by Pact, where children living in Wales are supported in visiting their mothers imprisoned in England (see Rees et al 2017). Visiting Mum is currently running in two women’s prisons in England: HMP Eastwood Park and HMP Styal, which are geographically the closest prisons to Wales (see Pact: nd). Linda’s recommendation, however, suggests there is a need for a similar service across all prisons.

Kayla, who had experienced imprisonment whilst her baby was still a newborn, suggested *“If they’ve got a mother and baby unit, they need to do more with it. Not just have it for the mother and baby that’s in there. There are other mothers on the other side [of the prison] that could benefit from it. If they can’t be on it let them see their baby for the day - a couple of hours. Do a course with them”, “You know like they do that baby massage and all that stuff”*. Opening up MBU’s, especially as many are not at full capacity (see Farmer 2019), during the daytime so that perinatal mothers who had not been accepted onto the MBU or who had not applied would therefore also provide opportunities for mothers to develop a *“better bond”* (Kayla) with their child. Having mother and baby groups tailored towards women in the general population may also be another way of providing opportunities for mother-baby-bonding, however, it would be best if these groups could take place outside of the prison grounds so that mothers could see their babies in a safer environment that is more conducive to mothering.

More emphasis must be placed on strategies for parents to be with their children in the community (see section 3.8) by diverting mothers away from custodial sentences and towards support, justice and accountability in the community. For mothers currently imprisoned, however, it must be ensured that CRL is utilised more frequently and consistently (see also Farmer 2019) and that it is also more accessible to mothers classified as ‘foreign nationals’ (see section 6.3.2), mothers who may not have yet ‘progressed’ to open conditions and mothers

who do not have access to housing on the outside (see section 5.4.2) so that they can also experience opportunities for mothering in the community (during the day as well as overnight). Regarding to the latter, safe and secure temporary housing must be made available to women and their families in the community for periods of ROTL, or more specifically CRL and such housing could also be available after release.

In relation to sentencing, it is also necessary to ensure that motherhood is properly accounted for and incorporated within sentencing decisions to ensure that children's right to family life are not ignored (see also Human Rights Act 1998; Minson 2017). This is reflected in Joy's experience, where her pregnancy was not mentioned in court. Clearer information is thus needed within sentencing guidelines to ensure that the required 'balancing exercise' underpinned by article 8 of the Human Rights Act (1998) is being carried out in an informed way by sentencers in relation to primary caregivers (see Epstein 2011; Minson 2014; 2017). In keeping with existing arguments and advocacy (Corston 2007; Minson 2017; Baldwin 2021), it is therefore emphasised that mothers should wherever possible within the current limits of the criminal justice system mother their children in the community not in prison. This would *begin* the abolitionist project of dismantling the prison estate by challenging prison expansion, reducing the prison population and opening up wider conversations about the use of imprisonment and its consequences for individuals, children, families and wider society.

As Black mothers experiences of sentencing have also been found to be impacted by racism (Malika and Chante; see also section 3.6), sentencing guidelines should require sentencers to balance the impact of racialised inequality and racism across the criminal justice system (Montieth et al 2022) when making such decisions, more readily call upon the expertise of witnesses in relevant fields to advise on this further (The Sentencing Project 2000) and engage more closely with diversion schemes that divert people away from imprisonment, a strategy that is currently being utilised by the Youth Justice Board to address racialised disparity in the youth justice system (Ministry of Justice 2020). Challenging the use of remand in sentencing could also address racialised inequalities, as discussed in subsection 5.3.2. However, it is acknowledged that when racism is institutional it cannot be simply trained or balanced out. Such recommendations thus attempt to mitigate against the impact of racism whilst

advocating for the creation of new systems of justice that are not entrenched with and underpinned by processes of marginalisation.

4. Community Support

Coming up to, or following, their release many of the mothers described there being very little support to “[re]build” (Sharon) their lives in light of the damage that had been caused by imprisonment. Joy described how whilst there were support and social groups for previously imprisoned women more broadly *“There was nothing like mother and baby groups. Nothing like support for people who have just been released”*. Linda highlighted: *“We (Black women) need funding. When you come out of prison you need funding. You need something cuz right now if I could find a charity that could fund me to do my business, I’d be so happy. But there’s nothing. There’s no help when you come out. You’re like stuck”* and describing support provided relating to housing in prisons Kayla noted: *“There’s no one doing any housing in women and male jails”*.

Not only is more funding needed to ensure that specialist community-based organisations are able to provide necessary and appropriate support, especially in relation to business and employment, more also needs to be done to ensure that such groups are visible and accessible. Providing all mothers leaving prison, as well as practitioners and services, with a directory of relevant organisations in the community may better support with visibility and accessibility. As well as increasing the funding for, and accessibility of, support services and community spaces - especially those developed by and for Black women and families (e.g., Sistah Space an community organisation supporting Black women who have experienced domestic violence and other forms of abuse) the government should also purposefully commit to the development of fully funded strategies for eradicating racialised, classed and gendered inequality and violence at both a national and international level that result in the disproportionate criminalisation and imprisonment of marginalised people.

It is acknowledged that some of the recommendations positioned above are somewhat reflective of the limits of the current criminal justice system and I am also alert to existing Black feminist and critical abolitionist arguments that have clearly evidenced how many proposed strategies of prison reform act to widen the net of imprisonment (Critical Resistance 2021;

Davis et al 2022). Nonetheless, as guided by the mothers' narratives, it *is* important to reduce the harm experienced by those currently affected by imprisonment (through short-term and immediate strategies of reform like those presented above) whilst still strongly advocating for, and working towards, "the eventual eradication of a system that continues to expand to the detriment of the daily lives of criminalised people and their families" (Scraton and Carlton 2017: 185 see also Carlen 2002b). In the concluding section that follows I thus position my final recommendation, based on my analysis of the mothers' narratives, that has resulted in the overarching position of this thesis advocating for a complete societal reimagining of justice.

8.7 "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House"⁷⁹: A Move Towards Abolition

By engaging in this research process, and listening closely to the mothers' narratives, I have found myself returning to abolitionist and Black feminist abolitionist arguments rooted in activist spaces as well as academic literature when seeking to reimagine the future of *justice* (see Davis 2003; Clarke and Chadwick 2017; Scraton and Carlton 2017; Roberts 2019; Gilmore 2020; Kaba 2017, 2021; Davis et al 2022). Davis (2003:9) observes that the institution of the "prison is [often] considered an inevitable and permanent feature of our social lives". However, the abolitionist agenda aims to subvert the assumed naturalness of the prison by challenging the socially constructed link between 'crime' and punishment, shining a light on the inequality and injustice that is woven into the very fabric of the criminal justice system, advocating for the dismantling of the prison and other oppressive forms of punishment all whilst *imagining* and creating transformative approaches to 'social' rather than 'criminal' justice (Davis 2003; Kaba 2017; Critical Resistance 2021).

Abolitionist scholars have often critiqued the reformist agenda for its restricted scope in challenging racism, inequality and inevitable institutional violence, as one cannot eradicate racism and inequality without dismantling the systems and processes that uphold, reproduce and rationalise it through their very existence (Clarke and Chadwick 2017; Scraton and Carlton 2017; Gilmore 2020). This is reflected in the racialised inequity that currently also categorises

⁷⁹ This quote is from Lorde (1984:110).

reform-based '*alternatives to custody*' for women (see Somota and Blake 2012; Clarke and Chadwick 2017⁸⁰), emphasising the limits of the criminal justice system as a whole. The abolitionist agenda thus attempts to move conversations beyond improving individual institutions and asserts the necessity of wider systematic and societal transformation. However, when focusing on gendered and racialised injustice it is necessary to acknowledge the close connection between Black feminist and abolition scholarship, a relationship that is reflected in the theoretical positioning of this thesis.

Abolition feminisms are argued to have originally emerged from Black feminist theory and Black feminist community organising practices (Kaba and Ritchie 2022). They are underpinned by the belief that in order to protect women from violence we must eradicate all forms of structural oppression including those that are maintained through surveillance, the criminal justice system and political borders (Kaba and Ritchie 2022). It is therefore not surprising that it was my close engagement with Black feminist theories and activist projects, which supported my analysis of Black mothers' narratives in and after imprisonment, that led me to the writings of Black feminist abolitionist scholars. Black feminist abolitionists explicitly consider the intersections between Black feminist and abolitionist thought and argue that it is through centering Black women's experiences of multiple forms of oppression that we come to "recognise the carceral state as the central organizer of racialized gender violence and a primary site and source of unfreedom for Black women" (Kaba and Ritchie 2022: para 18). The adoption of a Black feminist abolitionist approach thus provided me with the space to acknowledge the different forms of oppression experienced by Black mothers in an informed and meaningful way whilst also encouraging a more creative consideration of the possibilities available for freedom and liberation that exist outside of the parameters of the criminal justice system.

Many of the mothers I spoke with had experienced different forms of marginalisation and trauma prior to their criminalisation and imprisonment (such as financial strain, poverty,

⁸⁰ Clarke and Chadwick (2017) note, only 8% of women referred to women's centres within Manchester's custody diversion scheme were racialised as 'non-White', a relatively low percentage in contrast to their overrepresentation within the prison system.

domestic violence, child criminal exploitation, adult criminal exploitation, racism, health inequality and the imprisonment of family members), reflecting an absence of social and racial justice within society. This reflects feminist abolitionists Davis et al's (2022) argument that punishment is often used in replace of strategies of support, care and healing. Following this, the mothers had then experienced the violence of imprisonment often heightened by institutional racism and enforced reproductive oppression whilst also having to navigate the threat of state-intervention in the lives of their children, demonstrating a continuum of harm and subordination (see also Kaba and Ritchie 2022). Consequently, a move towards abolition would entail the dismantling of the current criminal justice system in acknowledgment of its' violent and oppressive nature and disproportionate impact within Black and other marginalised communities⁸¹ and the creative development of new community-based solutions for addressing economic, social and racial inequality and violence (Davis 2003; Kaba 2021). As Black feminist abolitionist Kaba (2021:19) affirms, abolition calls us to consider "what we can imagine for ourselves and the world".

Roberts (2012) emphasises how for Black feminist abolitionists, wider systematic change necessitates the creation of non-punitive approaches for addressing harm and violence whilst also nurturing the development of social conditions that mitigate against harm occurring in the first place, in acknowledgment that it is possible to "address the social causes of violence and hold people accountable without exposing them to police violence and state incarceration". This is further supported by Gilmore (1950) cited in Kaba (2017:np) "Abolition is about presence, not absence", highlighting how for many abolitionists the focus is not on '*tearing things down*' but rather the *rebuilding* of new ways of addressing and mitigating against harm as well as understanding healing and justice (see also section 3.5). Whilst I argue that the recommendations proposed in section 8.6.1 are necessary to better support the wellbeing of currently imprisoned Black mothers and their families in the short-term, if we are to ever truly

⁸¹ As highlighted previously, 73% of Black women on remand sentenced at the Magistrates' court do not go on to receive custodial sentences (The Howard League for Penal Reform 2020) and research by UK Government (2018) and the Youth Justice Board (2021a) also identify how remand is disproportionately used against Black women, men and children more broadly. Black women, men and children also disproportionately receive custodial sentences as a result of processes of marginalisation, disproportionate policing and unequal sentencing outcomes and are thus Black people are overrepresented across the entire prisons estate (Chigwada-Bailey 2003; Uhrig 2016; 2017b; 2020a; Lammy 2017).

address the multiple forms of oppression experienced by the mothers who participated in this research our vision for the long-term must be a complete social transformation through the building of a new society.

As discussed throughout the findings chapters of this thesis, *rebuilding* must encompass the development of strategies based in the community that enable equal access to reproductive and racial justice through ensuring all social systems are underpinned by principles of care and support rather than oppression (see also Cavanagh et al 2022). This will allow those who harm and those who are harmed to receive justice in a way that allows for restoration, repair and healing whilst also ensuring accountability and safety. It must empower children, families and communities to thrive in society (through access to quality education, housing, employment, healthcare, therapeutic services and community networks) and have faith in the new community-based processes that hold them accountable (Cavanagh et al 2022; Sultan and Herskind 2020). In light of these arguments, I have chosen to end this thesis - an overarching narrative of Black mothering and imprisonment - with the words of Annette, one of the mothers who shared her experiences with me:

“I understand that you’ve got to pay a price for a crime, but I think there’s other ways to pay for crimes other than removing you from your family.... It’s not really fixing a problem ...There’s nothing for me to gain from this. Nothing gained whatsoever. It’s just a lot of loss and a lot of heartache.”

Chapter Nine

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Chapter Ten

Appendices

Appendix One: HMP Greenhill

The following passage contains an excerpt formulated from my research notes, personal memory and interview transcripts which provides an insight into the particular institutional setting of Greenhill where Annette, Donna, Sharon and Malika's narratives were produced.

Being an open prison, HMP Greenhill is located in a very remote location surrounded by green fields and windy countryside lanes which are absent of the abundance of cars and buses you find in the city. Upon arrival it doesn't look like a prison with the reception 'security' desk tucked neatly in a corner; with no bullet-proof looking glass separating us like I'm used to when visiting or working in closed conditions. There are no body scanners, no x-ray machines; and no 'arms out', 'legs spread' body pat downs which I am also used to. I just sign my name, lock away my mobile phone; and then take a seat in the waiting area. As I sit on an old sofa, waiting for my contact to arrive, a woman sitting opposite me (who is anxiously awaiting her board review) reflects it "Feels like a boarding school". Another woman sitting on the sofa beside her – who is waiting to leave for her hospital appointment - then nods in agreement and notes "You forget your in prison sometimes". However, it is a prison and as the day progresses and I speak more deeply with the women imprisoned here I am repeatedly reminded of this - as one mother later states "Even though there's no fencing we still get locked in at eight o'clock".

Appendix Two: Mother and Baby Units in Prisons

Below are some example images of mother and baby units located in the English women's prisons estate to provide some situational context of these institutional spaces.



(Conway 2021)



(Sodexo nd)



(Abbott 2021)

Appendix Three: National Research Committee (NRC) Ethical Approval

Appendix Four: Cardiff University Ethical Approval



School of
Social Sciences
Ysgol y Gwyddorau
Cymdeithasol

Cardiff University

Glamorgan Building
King Edwards VII Avenue, Cardiff
CF10 3WT, Wales, UK
Tel +44(0)29 2087 5179
Fax +44(0)29 2087 4175

11 June 2019

Our ref: SREC/3350

MONICA IONA THOMAS
PhD Programme
SOCSI

Dear MONICA,

Your project entitled '*Absent mothers: Experiences of mothering amongst black female prisoners*' has now been approved by the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Cardiff University and you can now commence the project should all necessary forms of approval been received.

If you make any substantial changes with ethical implications to the project as it progresses you need to inform the SREC about the nature of these changes. Such changes could be: 1) changes in the type of participants recruited (e.g. inclusion of a group of potentially vulnerable participants), 2) changes to questionnaires, interview guides etc. (e.g. including new questions on sensitive issues), 3) changes to the way data are handled (e.g. sharing of non-anonymised data with other researchers).

In addition, if anything occurs in your project from which you think the SREC might usefully learn, then please do share this information with us.

All ongoing projects will be monitored and you will be obliged periodically to complete and return a SREC monitoring form.

Please inform the SREC when the project has ended.

Please use the SREC's project reference number above in any future correspondence.

Yours sincerely

]
Chair of School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Cc: Alisia Stevens





BLACK MOTHERHOOD AND IMPRISONMENT STUDY

WHO?

To participate you must:

- Identify as black
- Have had the significant responsibility of caring for a child (of any age) at any time prior to imprisonment
- Be comfortable communicating in English

WHAT

The Research involves:

- A one-on-one confidential interview with a black-mixed-race researcher
- Conversations about your experiences of motherhood and imprisonment

HOW

SOUNDS INTERESTING?

To take part please contact:

- Your personal officer
- Notify the wing office

Researcher name: Monica

Appendix Six: Cardiff University Ethics Amendment



School of
Social Sciences
Ysgol y Gwyddorau
Cymdeithasol

Cardiff University

Glamorgan Building
King Edwards VII Avenue, Cardiff
CF10 3WT, Wales, UK
Tel +44(0)29 2087 5179
Fax +44(0)29 2087 4175

13 July 2020

Our ref: SREC/3350

MONICA IONA THOMAS
PhD Programme
SOCSI

Prifysgol Caerdydd

Adeilad Morgannwg
Rhodfa'r Brenin Edward VII, Caerdydd
Ffon +44(0)29 2087 5179
Ffacs +44(0)29 2087 4175

Dear Monica,

Thank you for advising us of the changes to your project entitled '*Absent mothers: Experiences of mothering amongst black female prisoners*'. This has now been approved by the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Cardiff University and you can now commence the project should all necessary forms of approval been received.

If you make any substantial changes with ethical implications to the project as it progresses you need to inform the SREC about the nature of these changes. Such changes could be: 1) changes in the type of participants recruited (e.g. inclusion of a group of potentially vulnerable participants), 2) changes to questionnaires, interview guides etc. (e.g. including new questions on sensitive issues), 3) changes to the way data are handled (e.g. sharing of non-anonymised data with other researchers).

In addition, if anything occurs in your project from which you think the SREC might usefully learn, then please do share this information with us.

All ongoing projects will be monitored and you will be obliged periodically to complete and return a SREC monitoring form.

Please inform the SREC when the project has ended.

Please use the SREC's project reference number above in any future correspondence.

Yours sincerely

Chair of School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Cc: Alisia Stevens



Registered Charity No. 1136855
Elusen Gofrestredig Rhif. 1136855

Appendix Seven: List of Organisations

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ African Community Centre Swansea ▪ African Women Care ▪ Agenda ▪ Anawim ▪ Angelous Centre ▪ Atal y Fro ▪ BAME Birthing with Colour ▪ Barrow Cadbury Trust ▪ BAWSO ▪ Birmingham and Solihull Women’s Aid ▪ Birth Companions ▪ Bristol Women’s Voice ▪ Clean Break ▪ Clinks ▪ Commonweal Housing ▪ Farida Women’s Centre ▪ Full Circle Project ▪ Hafod Housing ▪ Howard League for Penal Reform ▪ Hibiscus ▪ Himaya Haven ▪ Imkaan ▪ Include ▪ London Black Women’s Project ▪ Malcom X Community Centre ▪ Oasis ▪ One25 Bristol ▪ Prison Advice and Care Trust ▪ Prisons Research Network ▪ ReConnect Housing ▪ Rochdale Women’s welfare association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Royal College of Occupational therapists ▪ Safe Ground ▪ Safer Wales ▪ Safety4sisters ▪ Sistersnotstrangers ▪ Sisters Uncut ▪ Smallwood Trust ▪ St Giles Trust ▪ Southall Black Sisters ▪ SOVA ▪ St Mungos ▪ St Pauls Nursery Children’s Centre ▪ Support and Action for Women Network (SAWN) ▪ The Motherhood Group ▪ Together Women ▪ Unlock ▪ Urban Circle ▪ Virgo Consultancy ▪ WAITS Action ▪ Walsall Black Sisters Collective ▪ Welsh Women’s Aid ▪ West Hampstead Women’s Centre ▪ Women’s Aid ▪ Women Connect First ▪ Women in Prison ▪ Women’s Link ▪ Women Seeking Sanctuary Advocacy Group ▪ Women’s Voices ▪ Working Chance
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Black Mothers' Experiences of Prison

Information for Interview Participation

What is the purpose of the research?

To date, there is no existing research concerning the lived experiences and specific needs of black mothers during and following imprisonment. This PhD research will provide an insight into the experiences of black mothers and will also provide suggestions of the ways in which such women can be better supported.

Why would I like to be involved?

If you self-identify as a black woman and were responsible for, or played a part in, caring for a child before and/or during a period of imprisonment you might want to take part in the research for the following reasons:

- Having an opportunity to discuss your experiences, thoughts and feelings regarding imprisonment with a black-mixed-race researcher
- Being able to recommend ways to help improve experiences for other black mothers currently in prison or at risk of going to prison

What do I have to do?

The research involves a single one-on-one interview with a black-mixed-race female researcher. If you agree, the interview will be tape recorded, but only the interviewer will have access to the recording and it will be deleted following the completion of the research. You will be asked questions about your experiences of motherhood, ethnic background, the criminal justice system and prison. However, you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to.

Where will the interview take place?

The interview will be a video or audio-only chat that takes place via zoom.

Will what I say be confidential?

The information that you share will be kept confidential unless you disclose that you are a risk to yourself or someone else. Your name will not be used in the final research report and any information provided that is able to identify you will be left out of the research in order to protect your right to privacy.

Do I have to be involved? If I get involved can I change my mind?

No, you do not have to take part in this research.

Even if you show an interest in the research you have a right to withdraw before, during or up to three weeks after the interview. This means if you change your mind the information you have provided will be kept out of the research findings and deleted.

For more information or to take part

Please ask contact me (Monica Thomas) at

Appendix Nine: Responses from Organisations⁸²

Table key:

Grey = response but research not circulated

Green: response and research circulated

White = no response

	Initial Response	Following Response(s)
1.	Advised of internal processes for research requests. Passed request on to appropriate contact.	Advised to contact another charity more relevant to research – contact details provided.
2.	Research information was shared.	
3.	Shared poster no response from women. Advised to contact different team within the same organisation – contact details provided.	The team were not currently working with any Black mothers.
4.	Advised my request was being considered by our advisory panel against the organisation's guidelines.	Informed it was against guidelines to share the research poster.
5.	Offered a virtual meeting to discuss research ethics/processes.	Research not currently considered to meet the guidelines of the organisation.
6.	Research information was shared.	
7.	Research Information was shared.	
8.	Research information was shared via newsletter.	
9.	Advised to contact team in a different city – contact provided.	No response from team.
10.	Advised to email rather than phone.	No response to emails.

⁸² Responses from the organisations have been presented in a random order so that they are not identifiable. They are not presented in the same order as the list in appendix nine.

11.	Research information was shared.	
12.	No answer.	
13.	Advised that support is not provided to the women centred within the research.	
14.	Closed due to Covid-19.	
15.	Research information was shared.	
16.	No response to emails	
17.	Due to Covid-19 phonenumber was emergency only.	Emailed later in the year – no response.
18.	Research information was shared online and added to newsletter	
19.	Advised to email head of the charity.	No response to emails.
20.	Phoned and emailed with no response.	
21.	Advised to contact a different charity – contacts details given.	
22.	Phoned and emailed with no response.	
23.	Answer machine so left message with no response.	
24.	Answer machine so left message with no response.	
25.	Emailed with no response.	
26.	Emailed/phoned with no response.	
27.	Emailed with no response.	
28.	Research information was shared and contact details given of other staff members.	Shared information with other staff members via email.
29.	Research information was shared.	No uptake.
30.	Probably can't help but have forwarded email on to manager	Retweeted on twitter
31.		
32.	Shared with relevant project.	Contacted relevant team and research shared.
33.	Not able to assist with this research as very few people they support have experience of imprisonment and even fewer are women/mothers.	

34.	Answer machine so left message and emailed – no response.	
35.	Shared on social media but could not make direct contact with women.	
36.	Email forwarded to different organisation.	
37.	Emailed with no response.	
38.	Organisation only just re-opened following Covid-19 and were only facilitating telephone support – not appropriate at this time to support research.	
39.	Organisation receives many research requests and does not have the staff or resources to accommodate this.	
40.	Organisation does not directly work with women.	
41.	Organisation forwarded research to colleagues who were interested. During Covid-19 not able to support research as attention focused on supporting physical and mental health of women.	
42.	Organisation not currently supporting any Black mothers. Provided list of other relevant organisations.	
43.	Emailed no response.	
44.	Organisation does not facilitate research.	
45.	Organisation does not share research information – email forwarded on to relevant organisations who do.	
46.	Organisation not currently accepting research requests.	
47.	Emailed no response.	
48.	Emailed no response.	

49.	Phoned and emailed no response.	
50.	Organisation not currently supporting any Black mothers with experience of imprisonment.	
51.	Emailed no response.	
52.	Organisation shared the research with women.	None of the women indicated an interest in taking part – advised this would likely have been different outside of the context of Covid-19 if the organisation was open.
53.	Organisation shared the research with their contact list but warned unlikely to get response as very quiet at the moment due to Covid-19.	
54.	Emailed/phoned no response.	
55.	Emailed no response.	
56.	Emailed/phoned no response.	
57.	Emailed/phoned no response.	
58.	Emailed no response.	
59.	Emailed no response.	

Appendix Ten: London Probation Research Committee Ethical Approval

Appendix Eleven: Information Sheet (Prisons)



Black Mothers' Experiences of Prison

Information for Interview Participation

What is the purpose of the research?

As black women, and in particular the needs and experiences of black mothers, are vastly under researched this research will provide the prison service with information about how they could better help and support black mothers during their imprisonment.

Why would I like to be involved?

If you self-identify as a black woman and prior to your imprisonment you were responsible for, or played a significant part in, the caring of a child you might want to take part in the research for the following reasons:

- Having an opportunity to discuss your experiences, thoughts and feelings regarding imprisonment with a black-mixed-race researcher
- Being able to recommend ways to make your, and your families, experiences of prison better

What do I have to do?

The research involves a single one-on-one interview with a black-mixed-race female researcher. If you agree, the interview will be tape recorded, but only the interviewer will have access to the recording and it will be deleted following the completion of the research. You will be asked questions about your experiences of motherhood, ethnic background, the criminal justice system and prison. However, you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to.

Will what I say be confidential?

The information that you share will be kept confidential unless you disclose that you are intending to harm yourself or someone else. Your name will not be used in the final research report and any information provided that is able to identify you will be left out of the research in order to protect your right to privacy.

Do I have to be involved? If I get involved can I change my mind?

No, you do not have to take part in this research.

Even if you show an interest in the research it is also your right to withdraw at any stage of the research process. This means that you can change your mind at any time, including during or after the interview, and any information you have provided will be kept out of the research findings and deleted.

For more information,

Please ask your personal officer to contact Monica, or leave a message for Monica in the wing office. I will then contact you as soon as possible to discuss in more detail what taking part in this research would mean for you.

Appendix Twelve: Consent Form



Consent form

Black Mothers' Experiences of Prison

Name of researcher: Monica

	Please tick if you agree
1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet provided for the study. I have considered the information and had the opportunity ask questions and am happy with the answers I have received.	
2. I understand that my participation within the study is voluntary, and I am able to withdraw my consent at any stage of the research process.	
3. I consent to being recorded during the interview	
4. I consent to taking part in the study.	

Name of participant

-----/----/----
Date

Signature

Monica

-----/----/----
Date

Signature

Appendix Thirteen: Interview Guide (Prison)

Would you like to start by telling me a bit about yourself?

- How many children do you have? How old are they? Were any other children in your care?
- Did you share parenting roles with anyone?
- Whose care are they currently in? How was this decided?

How would you describe your experience of being a mother in prison?

- Did you maintain contact? How often?
- Distance/cost
- Assisted visits?

In what ways did prison change your experience of mothering?

- What were some of the challenges you faced in prison?
- What impact did/has this had on you emotionally/physically?

Did you feel that you had good support networks surrounding you?

- Family
- Friends – in/out of prison
- Community
- Prison staff

How did this compare to women from other racial backgrounds?

Would you say that your friends, family or community were accepting and understanding of you being in prison?

How & why

What was life like for you before going to prison?

- What roles/responsibilities did you have?
- What did you do? Did you work?
- What was motherhood like for you?

-

Do you mind if I ask you about your children?

- How did they react to your imprisonment?
- How did they feel about you being in prison?

Thinking back to the court process, what was your experience of sentencing like?

- Did you inform the court you had children?
- What effect do you think this had?
- Did your legal team warn you that you may be facing an immediate custodial sentence?
- Did your children know you might not be coming home?

What support programmes, courses, charities were available to you in prison?

- Did you find these relevant/ helpful?
- Did these meet your needs?

Do you feel you had the same access to services/programmes/support as mothers from other racial backgrounds?

Did you feel your race impacted your experience of prison in any way? Do you think that impacted upon your relationship with your children?

Have you had any experience applying for or being on an MBU? OR Can you tell me about your experience on a MBU?

- Application process - was it easy to apply?
- Were you encouraged to apply?
- Reasons for acceptance/rejection
- Experience

What do you think could be done to better support mothers during their imprisonment?

What support did you need upon release?

Is there anything the prison service could have done to better support you?

Appendix Fourteen: Interview Guide (Community)

<p>Would you like to start by telling me a bit about yourself?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How many children do you have? How old are they? ▪ Are they living with you now? ▪ Are you employed? <p>If we start from the beginning of your journey of imprisonment, what was life like for you before going to prison?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What roles/responsibilities did you have? ▪ What did you do? Did you work? ▪ What was motherhood like for you? Did you live with your children? <p>Thinking back to the court process, can you talk me through your experience of sentencing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Did you inform the court you had children? ▪ What effect do you think this had? ▪ Did your legal team warn you that you may be facing an immediate custodial sentence? ▪ How did you explain to your children what was happening? Did your children know you might not be coming home? <p>Were you able to decide where your children would stay during your imprisonment?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If so, how did you make this decision? What options were available to you? ▪ If not, how did this make you feel? ▪ Where did your children live whilst you were in custody/who took care of them? Were they together/separated? <p>How would you describe your experience of being a mother in prison?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Did you maintain contact? How often? ▪ Distance/cost ▪ Assisted visits? <p>In what ways did prison change your experience of mothering?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What were some of the challenges you faced in prison? ▪ What impact did/has this had on you emotionally/physically? 	<p>Would you say that your friends, family, or community were accepting and understanding of you being in prison? How & why</p> <p>What support programmes, courses, charities were available to you in prison?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Did you find these relevant/ helpful? ▪ Did these meet your needs? ▪ Did you feel as though you had a good enough understanding of the prison system to effectively communicate your needs to staff members? <p>Do you feel you had the same access to services/programmes/support as mothers from other racial backgrounds?</p> <p>Were there any times where you felt your race impacted your experience of prison in any way? If so, how did you respond to these experiences?</p> <p>Have you had any experience applying for or being on an MBU? OR can you tell me about your experience on an MBU?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Application process - was it easy to apply? - Were you encouraged to apply? - Reasons for acceptance/rejection - Experience <p>What do you think could be done to better support mothers during their imprisonment?</p> <p>Moving on to life after prison, what was it like returning to life on the outside?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What support did you need upon release? And what support was provided? ▪ Is there anything the prison service could have done to better support you? ▪ Did family/friends accept you home? Was there any continued stigma? Did the support from the outside you had during prison continue upon release? <p>Were you able to continue mothering as you had done before prison or had anything changed?</p>
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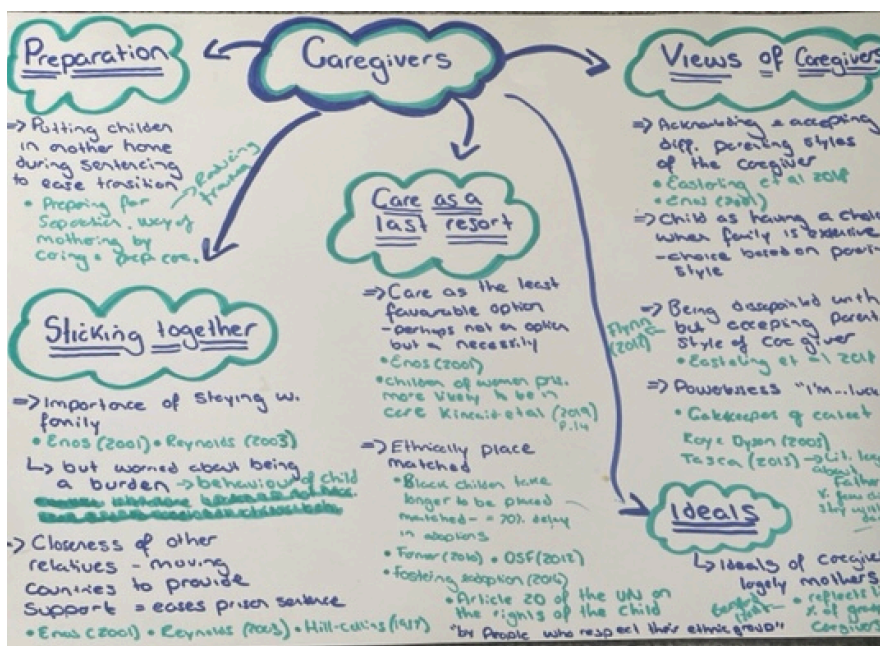
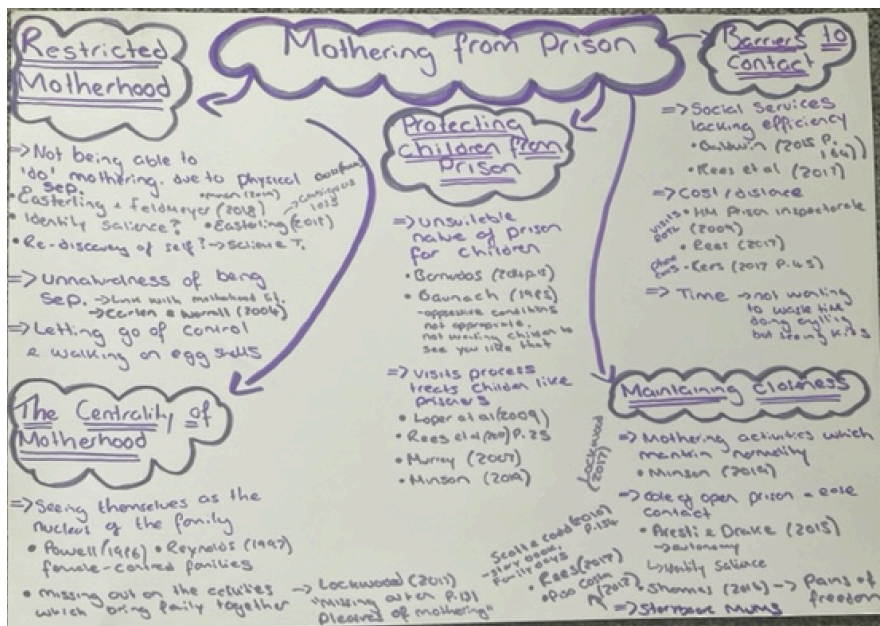
<p>Do you mind if I ask you about your children?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How did they react to your imprisonment? - How did they feel about you being in prison? <p>Did you feel there were good support networks surrounding you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Family ▪ Friends – in/out of prison ▪ Community ▪ Prison staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Had your relationship changed with your children? (If still had access/care responsibilities) ▪ Were you able to discuss your experience openly with your children? ▪ How would you describe your experience of being a mother after imprisonment? ▪ Have you faced any challenges relating to mothering post-prison? <p>What is life like for you now? Do you feel your experience of imprisonment is still shaping your life [and] relationship with your children?</p>
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Appendix Fifteen: The Mothers

Pseudonym	Age	Self-described identity	Number of children at time of Imprisonment (including pregnancy)	Type(s) of imprisonment	Number of times in prison	Sentence Length(s)	Time passed since last release	Length of narrative transcript
<i>Annette</i>	38	Black, British (Caribbean heritage)	1	Custodial sentence	1	4.5 years	N/A	2,272 words
<i>Donna</i>	50	Mixed-race, British (Caribbean and British heritage)	4	Custodial sentence	1	6 Years	N/A	5,291 words
<i>Malika</i>	32	Black, British (Caribbean and American heritage)	4	Custodial sentence	1	4 years	N/A	3,427 words
<i>Sharon</i>	51	Black, British (Caribbean heritage)	3	Custodial sentence	1	8 years	N/A	4,454 words
<i>Linda</i>	52	Black, British	1	Custodial sentence	1	9 years	16 years	2,899 words
<i>Chante</i>	30	Black, British (Caribbean heritage)	2	Remand (Six months)	1	N/A	7 years	7,949 words
<i>Joy</i>	47	Black, West African	1	Custodial sentence	1	7 years	10 years	8,880 words

<i>Kayla</i>	32	Black, British (Black Caribbean heritage)	3	Custodial sentence and licence recall (three months)	3	1.5 years 2 years 3 months	5 years	9,681 words
<i>Trish</i>	33	Black, British (Caribbean and African heritage)	1	Custodial sentence	1	9 years	2 years	18,226 Words

Appendix Sixteen: Initial Mind Maps (Examples)



Appendix Seventeen: Later stage Mind Maps (Examples)

