



**THE CAMERA IS OURS**

# Hostile

*+ director Sonita Gale in conversation with musician and Executive Producer Nitin Sawhney*

*Hostile* is first-time filmmaker Sonita Gale's exploration of the 'hostile environment' policy, offering a humanising portrayal of those caught in an utterly dehumanising system. The policy, which has expanded over the last decade, has seen the increased criminalisation and marginalisation of undocumented migrants, with a focus on making their lives as difficult as possible through reduced access to basic services and heavier policing.

While focusing on a contemporary UK policy, *Hostile* pans out historically and geographically, weaving together present-day stories with those of colonialism and the postwar period, and experiences spanning the Commonwealth. The result is one of the most comprehensive accounts of how we arrived at our current immigration system and legislation, meriting the film a place not just in cinemas across the country but in classrooms and courts of justice alike.

Gale's subjects are her peers: working-class migrants and their children who settled across Britain in the postwar era. She explains: 'I grew up in a Black and brown community in Wolverhampton. My parents arrived here from India, after partition and during the postwar wave of migration. It was a time of great social change, and in a way Black and Asian communities were at the forefront of this.' *Hostile* hones in on this social change in the context of an increasingly intolerant political landscape.

Introduced by the Conservative government in 2012, the hostile environment policy has gone on to provoke the Windrush scandal and mistreatment of human trafficking victims, most recently manifesting itself in the Nationality and Borders Bill, which has come under direct fire from the UNHCR, the UN's refugee agency. Yet the rife xenophobia detailed throughout the film, and in many instances ratified by law, emanates from all sides, and *Hostile* evades placing blame exclusively on the ruling party, also detailing Labour's complicity. Gale notes, for example, 'the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act was pushed through by Labour home secretary James Callaghan. It subjected all holders of UK passports to immigration controls unless they, their parents or a grandparent had been born, adopted or naturalised in the United Kingdom.'

Gale points out that this law coincided with the expulsion of Uganda's sizable South Asian population at the order of dictator Idi Amin. This South Asian presence in east Africa feeds into the personal background of Daksha, one of the individuals the documentary follows, who lovingly masterminds a voluntary kitchen to provide upwards of 2,000 meals on a daily basis to people lacking guaranteed access to food. But it also embodies the intersecting experiences of Black and Asian communities that animate the film, which engages a host of such voices from Brixton to the Midlands.

'Growing up in the 1970s, I remember a lot of good spirit between the two communities,' says Gale, while noting the differences in media portrayals of the two groups. She talks of her frustration at the media's neglect of the

political organising initiated by South Asian migrants and their children throughout history, often in collaboration with Black communities, such as Bradford's United Black Youth League. She's hoping to centre her next film on these complex and under-explored encounters, which span the Caribbean, east Africa, the Indian Ocean, as well as urban hubs of postcolonial migration like her native Wolverhampton.

These encounters between cultures are reflected in the documentary's musical direction. The film's executive producer is musician Nitin Sawhney, who has a committed track record of supporting human rights both within and beyond his musical output. Gale remembers the impact of hearing Sawhney's seminal 1999 album *Beyond Skin* and its track 'Immigrant', which uses audio from his father coming to the UK. 'His perception of the country really stuck with me. It was wonderful to document the migrant experience in another format such as music.' In 2021, Sawhney released the album *Immigrants*, which spurred Gale to interview him. 'Our conversations continued, and I asked if he wanted to be an executive producer.'

Also on the soundtrack are British-Jamaican musician, composer and cellist Ayanna Witter-Johnson, and award-winning British-Ugandan George the Poet. As music and poetry are perhaps the most prominent means of diasporic self-expression, they are key in Gale's desire to 'change the narrative around how we speak about migrants'.

Depicting political and economic orders with an ever-expanding appetite to exclude – first migrants, then their children, soon the white working class – *Hostile* reaches the dystopian conclusion that all humans risk being entirely reduced to their value and productivity through a capitalist lens. It's a bleak verdict, but one offset by the fact that the film's very existence and timely release have the potential to provoke change. 'Films connect different communities, organisations and demographics, and I have seen that during the making and release of *Hostile*,' says Gale. She's keen to maximise the reach of her film, acknowledging 'there is a current market for more immersive and inclusive experiences within film, with the pandemic demonstrating how we can open our doors to audience participation from all over the world.'

She's actively engaged in off-screen action, creating an accompanying campaign which is 'all about bringing awareness of the issues in the film, and seeking solutions to them.' Her hope is that *Hostile* can have an impact not only in the cultural sphere but in political and legislative ones too. 'Our endgame is a screening in parliament and the UN, with the hope of bringing about actual policy change.'

**Abiba Coulibaly, [bfi.org.uk](https://www.bfi.org.uk), 4 March 2022**

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## HOSTILE

*Directed by:* Sonita Gale  
©: Gale Force Films Limited  
*A Galeforce Films production*  
*Executive Producers:* Charlotte Fisher, Nitin Sawhney CBE  
*Produced by:* Sonita Gale  
*Associate Producer:* Raghav Pasricha  
*Production Manager:* Eleanor Scott  
*Written by:* Sonita Gale  
*Script Editor:* Heather Walsh  
*Development Researcher:* Jess Gell  
*Researchers:* Freya Pratty-Williams, James Holmes, Olivia Grace Hird, Olivia Smith, Liam Curran, Robert Eades  
*Archive Researcher:* Leonie Rousham  
*Director of Photography:* Neil Harvey  
*Additional Cinematography:* Ian Salvage, Joseph Hallgate, Patrick Smith, Walter Finch  
*Editor:* Alex Fry  
*Music:* Nitin Sawhney CBE  
*Additional Music by:* Ayanna Witter-Johnson  
*Spoken Word:* George the Poet  
*Sound Recordists:* Alan Hill, Andrew Hoare, Andrew Yarme, Andy Paddon, Christopher Travers, Freddie Claire, Ian Maclagan, James Thomson, Louis Innis, Max Berridge, Olly Jennings, Phil Bax, Seb Blach, Stephen Anderson, Thomas Hart-George  
*Re-recording Mixer:* Nigel Squibbs

## Featuring

Akram Salhab  
Anthony Bryan  
Brad Evans  
Daksha Varsani  
Dave Carr  
Elyas Ismail  
Farrukh Sair  
Gargi Bhattacharyya  
Janet McKay-Williams  
Jeevun Sandher  
Maya Goodfellow  
Michael Bankole  
Nitin Sawhney CBE  
Paresh Jethwa  
Patrick Vernon OBE  
Saba Sair  
Councillor Sonia Winifred  
Stephen Timms MP  
Zarah Sultana MP  
Zana Khan

UK 2021©  
97 mins

[www.hostiledocumentary.com](http://www.hostiledocumentary.com)

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## THE CAMERA IS OURS: BRITAIN'S WOMEN DOCUMENTARY MAKERS

**From Beside the Seaside to the English Inn:  
Restoration Programme 1 + intro by BFI curator Ros Cranston**  
Thu 3 Mar 18:15

**For Sama + intro by director Waad Al-Kateab  
+ Children of the Ruins**  
Thu 3 Mar 20:30

**The Camera Is Ours: Study Day + Independent Miss Craigie  
+ Q&A with director Lizzie Thynne and producer Hollie Price**  
Sat 5 Mar 12:00-17:00

**From the Sea to the Land Beyond**  
Sat 5 Mar 18:15

**Seniors Free Archive Matinee: White Riot + discussion**  
Mon 7 Mar 14:00

**Cow**  
Tue 8 Mar 20:40  
**The Hermit of Treig + Q&A with director Lizzie MacKenzie**  
Fri 11 Mar 18:10

**From Birth-Day to Something Nice to Eat:  
Restoration Programme 2 + intro by BFI curator Ros Cranston**  
Mon 14 Mar 18:15  
**Hostile + director Sonita Gale in conversation with Nitin Sawhney**  
Tue 15 Mar 18:00

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## The Camera Is Ours: Britain's Women Documentary Makers

(two-disc DVD) is released in March

A collection of shorts and features will soon be available on BFI Player

## MEZZANINE GALLERY

### Jill Craigie: Film Pioneer

In the 1940s Jill Craigie tackled subjects new to cinema in a unique blend of documentary, drama and, frequently, humour. One of the most photographed directors of her time, she was dubbed 'Britain's first woman filmmaker' by the press, while she herself championed community voices and performers. This exhibition draws on a variety of sources, including works by leading photographers Lee Miller and Fred Daniels, to explore what made Craigie and her working methods unique. From Thu 3 Mar  
Guest curator: Lizzie Thynne  
Supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and The University of Sussex

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