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Being Deathworthy: The UK Government and Media's Industrialization of Black Death at Sea

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Abstract

Who is deemed deathworthy, and how is this status produced? What discourses, affects, and histories enable the industrialization of premature Black death while rendering it largely invisible? Rooted in a decolonial queer feminist epistemological framework, this article examines how discursive and affective strategies in U.K. print media and immigration policies during the European "refugee crisis" (2013–2016) justified routine death-making at sea. Conceptualizing Blackness as a relational political and epistemological tool, the article reveals how media and state actors—drawing on racialized mythologies of young single Black men and appeals to imperial nostalgia—constructed these men as objects of panic, disgust, resentment, and fear. Applying collocation analysis and visualization techniques, the article theorizes "affective-racialized networks"—discursive formations that circulate and accumulate affective meanings across space and time, shaping public perception and legitimizing policies of deterrence, externalization, and active abandonment. These networks sustained the routinized deaths of Black migrant men at sea, reinforcing Europe's imperial border regimes. By foregrounding the mutual constitution of race, affect, and temporality, this study expands migration scholarship's engagement with race, demonstrating how racial logics operate beyond geopolitical and temporal boundaries through transnational circuits of meaning, power, and governance. The article argues that centering Blackness and affect is essential to understanding how racialization functions and how Black deaths are rendered normative within global bordering practices.

Keywords: Blackness; affect; deathworthy; UK/EU; migration; Black fugitivity; masculinities

Being Deathworthy

"They, we, inhabit knowledge that the Black body is a sign of immi/a/nent death"
    ~ **Sharpe** (2023, 71)

What's politically at stake when we attend unflinchingly to the arrangements that maintain the normativity of antiblack brutality and violence?

The political stakes are for many, a question of life and death.

The concept of "deathworthy," as introduced by Eberhardt et al.'s (2006) study, finds that the more stereotypically Black a defendant is perceived to look, the more likely they are to be sentenced to death (Eberhardt et al. 2006). Hence, the title of the article, "Looking *Deathworthy*." Using a phrase coined in the U.S. carceral system and ascribing it to the lethal consequences of U.K. immigration policies and media discourses reflects my relational theoretical disposition to the study of race and racisms: racial ideas and practices transcend geopolitical contexts, as well as temporal instances (Goldberg 2009b; Gilmore 2002). Moreover, contemporary racisms constitute multiple temporalities; "the 'past' fails to stay in the past" (Trouillot 1995, 148). Said otherwise, the politics of Black death, knows no national and temporal boundaries.

This article seeks to understand how discourses, affects, and histories were entangled in the politics of death-making during the height of the European "refugee crisis" (2013–2016), with a particular focus on the role played by the U.K. government and its most widely read print media leading up to the "Brexit" Referendum.[1] The European "refugee crisis"—which I understand as a regime-orchestrated *racial* crisis—represents a critical historical and political flashpoint. A decade later, this moment remains pivotal, shaping how news discourse and policy continue to frame and scrutinize asylum seekers attempting to enter Europe through "illegalized" means (Gozzi 2024). In April 2024, protesters in the halls of the European Union (EU) Parliament chanted "this pact kills" as the EU passed an asylum pact that had been initiated in 2015 (Henley 2024). Just days later, the UK government, propelled by the momentum of 2015, signed into law the deportation of asylum seekers to Rwanda for permanent settlement (*BBC* 2024). Although this law was later repealed by the new Labor Government, the new leadership focused less on questioning the *premise* of the Rwanda agreement but more on its *inefficiency* in curbing "illegal immigration"(Aljazeera 2024).

The recent violent "race" riots across the UK targeting asylum seekers, refugees, and Black, especially Muslim British citizens, makes this study and its arguments all the more urgent. There remains, however, pressing need for a deeper historicization of the role *traditional* media discourse has played in fomenting these riots, as well as a critical examination of UK immigration policies themselves. The UK government's draconian immigration policies precede the European "refugee crisis," rooted in colonial practices of forcible removal, displacement, and dispersal of populations throughout the British Empire (El-Enany 2020; Collyer and Shahani 2023). These historical and more recent policies, along with media discourses, have played a crucial role in fortifying imperial bordering practices of the EU and perpetuating its habitual practices of Black death-making.

A significant example is the Cameron Government's decision in October 2014 to cut funds to *Operation Mare Nostrum*, a naval and air mission focused on Mediterranean search-and-rescue efforts (Travis 2014). Arguing that these rescues encouraged "illegal immigration," the EU ended *Mare Nostrum* just three days following the UK's defunding (BBC News 2015). Contrary to their claims, the reduction in search-and-rescue operations led to a 160 percent surge in asylum

seekers attempting the journey, with a corresponding rise in fatalities—a trend that worsened in 2016 (IOM 2020; Varrella 2021; Lloyd-Damnjanovic 2020).

Despite the disproportionate deaths at sea of men from Africa and the Middle East, mainstream media discourse seldom confronts the racial and gendered brutality of Europe's bordering regimes. Violence against the Black male body is not recognized *as* violence; it fails to take root in the white liberal imaginary (Rankine 2015; Sharpe 2023). Instead, it is indexed as unremarkable, as quotidian. This colonial disremembering and the countless, accumulating "strange fish" (Bertoluzzi 2018) compel scholars to critically confront Europe's persistent refusal to reckon with its colonial legacies—legacies it simultaneously denies and upholds through deadly border practices.[2]

> **"We were too Black**
> **too abject"**
> ~ **Wadud (2019, 22)**

To think "Black," or with and through "Blackness" as I do here, enriches our understanding of how we identify and contend with the modalities of power that sustain "Europe"s bordering regimes. I theorize Blackness as sociohistorical existence, as episteme, as critical ontology, and as a political tool against the violences of modernity (Gilroy 1987; Hall 1990; Wynter 2003; Hartman 2008; Sharpe 2016; Mbembe 2017; Wilderson 2020; Elg 2021; Moten and Harney 2013). Black epistemologies offer a different reading of the world situated within borderless thinking, which is to say, a decolonial prism. This different reading of the world offers at least two epistemological insights. First, it recognizes the prominence of Blackness in modern social structures, stressing that how bodies are read generates and provokes significant socioeconomic, political, material, and affective impacts and outcomes for Black peoples. Second, using Blackness as episteme foregrounds the entangled geographies of Black life, shaped by historical contours of colonization, racialization, capitalism, and modernity. Therefore, Blackness—beyond attachments to identity, origin, or phenotypical features—signifies a condition of dispossession, brutalization, exploitation, and expulsion that affects vast segments of the global population, and structures all human relations (Wilderson 2020; Elg 2021). Yet, crucially, I do not consider Blackness as a site of pure negation, hopelessness, or irredeemable violence. Blackness holds within it generative potentialities, corresponding with acts of rebellion, practices of creation, refusal, and self-determination (Glissant 1997; Moten and Harney 2013; Da Silva 2014). A theoretical logic that insists that negation and creation are mutually constitutive.

Moreover, I do not view Blackness as a singular, static identity that erases histories or creates false equivalences. Black bodies exist in diverse forms. Nor do I overlook the significance of racially legible identities—visual or otherwise—exploited to sustain socioeconomic and political inequities among subjugated peoples. These exploitative practices are evident in how UK media sharply distinguished between Syrians as legitimate "refugees"—deserving of humanitarian protection—and "African migrants," who were cast as repulsive and incompatible with vulnerability. This discourse reinforces the political currency of projecting "Africans" as *particularly* abject subjects, while underscoring how Blackness is shaped by the duality of *desire* and *repulsion* (Mbembe 2017). The relentless Euro-

colonial drive to segregate and categorize, by continually reinstating hierarchies, forces Black bodies to oscillate between belonging and exclusion in Euro-American contexts, all while struggling to maintain the facade of equitable multi-racial or even "post-racial" societies.

For instance, during the period I examine, UK newsprint media and government discourses commodified Syrian refugees as desirable subjects, masking how European border controls are not only racist but also critical sites for cultivating and managing whiteness. It's imperative for the liberal order and the legitimacy of European border controls that they are not perceived as racist (Anderson 2024). EU and British policymakers would have us believe that *nationality*, not *race*, drives immigration control logics. Nationality has thus played a pivotal role in the post-imperial regulation of race, territory, and statehood (Mongia 2018). Yet, nationality itself is a social construct rooted in colonial-racial foundations (cf. Goldberg (2002). Humanitarian discourses that favor certain nationalities should not be mistaken for signaling inherent ontological differences between Black bodies. Instead, they reveal how those deemed *provisionally* deserving of humanitarian protection are still governed by the same colonial logics and racialized border structures (Ticktin 2011).

This phenomenon is clearly demonstrated by the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), launched by the UK Government in January 2014 to provide "sanctuary" to hundreds of Syrians. Here, humanitarianism—rooted in the histories and practices of earlier imperial projects—operated through a colonial politics of pity and affective righteousness, manifesting in paternalistic practices of "helping those in need," as Britain had supposedly done "so proudly throughout history" (Prime Minister's Office, 2015). At its core, humanitarian relief was really about civilizing and saving the "Arab Muslim" subject. Crucially, the maintenance of state control over European borders, and the broader preservation of white dominance, relies on this flexibility—and fabrication of histories—in discursive rationales and policy justifications.

I deploy "Black" as a relational, expansive, dynamic, and political vernacular that points to subjugated peoples living within histories of colonization and the ongoing forces of white coloniality. This aligns with what scholar-activist Avtar Brah, in the Black British Feminist tradition, refers to as "Black as political color"(Bhandar and Ziadah 2020), or what in the African Feminist and Black Consciousness tradition was understood as an identity constituted by political consciousness (Lewis and Baderoon 2021). Rather than being fragmented by colonial vocabularies like "Brown" and "BIPOC," my approach reorients our focus toward how the imperial reach and architectures of violence create disposable, deathworthy bodies that I identify as *politically* Black. This global, historically situated conception of Blackness underpins a scholarship committed to the belief that borderless, decolonial politics is indispensable to racial redress (Anderson, Sharma, and Wright 2012; Mbembe 2018). My point of departure, therefore, is to draw on Blackness's confrontational power to challenge and expose the racial logics that sustain bordering regimes, citizenship, and constructions of (un)belonging *everywhere*.

Finally, my use of Blackness carries a considered urgency, particularly in the context where modernity's cumulative, entangled, and cruel catastrophes devastate Black lives across geographies. Deploying this critical political grammar lays bare the workings of modern power in producing *deathworthy* subjects as a *ritualized*

practice. More importantly, it also inaugurates crucial ontologies and alternative socialities—connected, indebted, dispersed, relational—that direct us toward sites of opposition and mutual struggle (Neimanis 2017; Partridge 2023). By cultivating these imaginaries of relating differently, we open compelling avenues for transnational and translocal political organizing and solidarity-building, fostering opportunities for political rupture.

Masculinities and Migration: An Interdisciplinary, Multi-Method Inquiry

This paper integrates critical discourse, affect, and visuality theories with critical geography, mobilities studies, masculinity studies, and Decolonial/African and queer feminisms.[3] It examines discursive-affective and visual representations of "migrant subjects" in three major U.K. newspapers—*The Daily Mail*, *The Sun*, and *The Daily Mirror*—alongside immigration policies from January 2013 to May 2016. These representations fostered a distinct politics of affect. State and media narratives, using racialized mythologies about young men and imperial nostalgia, portrayed "Black African," "North African/Arab Muslim," and "Eastern European" male migrants as objects of panic, disgust, resentment, and fear.

Using multi-methods and visualization techniques, I propose a theoretical and methodological approach that considers affect as indispensable to understanding constructions of race in political discourse. Visualization techniques reveal the "onto-epistemologies"[4] (McKittrick 2018) of discursive-affective grammar and legitimized violence manufactured by U.K. popular print media—what I term "affective-racialized networks." These networks represent an original and experimental methodology that illuminates the racial, gendered, and affective onto-epistemologies recurrently used by print media during the height of the "crisis." I argue that these regimes of representation, pervasive across these publications for nearly three years, rendered the vulnerability of Black single adult male migrants inconceivable. More damningly, I contend that this politics of affect contributed to the industrialization of death at sea—the countless, often-overlooked deaths (or quotidian atrocities) of predominantly Black migrant men. This finding is crucial for migration scholarship, as the complex, mutually constitutive relationships between media, public attitudes, and migration policymaking remain woefully under-researched (Bleich, Bloemraad, and de Graauw 2015).

Although men have long been the focus of migration research, they have often been studied as genderless objects. In their seminal publication on *Men, Masculinities, and Migration*, Wojnicka and Pustułka (2019, 91) show how "masculinity, as an important factor influencing migration, has been neglected." Migration research covering men and masculinities has not provided a comprehensive account of masculinities with some recent exceptions (see e.g.,(Griffiths 2015; Baker and Levon 2015; Scheibelhofer 2017; Palillo 2018; Bilgiç 2018; Zablotsky 2020). Research has instead examined the construction of masculinities in isolation, apart from other attributes like age and race, or the colonial histories through which masculinities are dynamically experienced and represented (Hall 1997; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). This is different from comparable research in women's studies that has accounted for intersectionality in analyzing social identity (Crenshaw 1989; Yuval-Davis 2011).

Within Europe, even fewer studies on migration consider masculinities and racialized discourses together. Accordingly, the discursive-affective construction of "Black masculinities" is a significant contribution of this paper.

Affect: The State, Media, and the Politics of Death-Making

Af·fect: verb.

    to act on and cause a change in (someone or something)
    to produce an emotional response in (someone)
    to feel attachment for (someone or something)
    also, to be *moved.*

Queer feminist engagement with affect expands our ways of knowing while challenging colonial ideas of "detached reason," which often dictate "legitimate" approaches to migration scholarship. Using affect as both theory and method opens politically salient modes of "knowing," countering the limited epistemological imagination of modernity/coloniality. Although often overlooked in studies of migration and media representation, affect is essential for fully understanding the spatial and material dynamics of racial ordering and bordering practices (Ahmed 2013; Tyler 2013; Ioanide 2015; Fischer-Tiné 2017; Holzberg 2024). Feminists and affect theorists have long recognized the significance of affect in the production and maintenance of gendered racism, sexualized and classed power relations, nativism, and imperialism (Lorde 1981; Pedwell and Whitehead 2012; Åhäll 2018).

Building on decolonial and queer feminist reasonings, this article foregrounds affect as theory and methodology, conceptualizing affect as the actions and effects of emotions through cultural and political practices (Ahmed 2013). In short, affect is what emotions *enact.*

Affect holds multiple meanings, and by recalling these meanings above, my intent is to enunciate how the politics of affect is implicated in at least four practices. First, affect *does something*. Political elites shape racial ideologies through emotional practices, evoking *strong public emotional responses* that support border expansion and justify routine death-making. State's also deploy affects to *produce emotional "attachments"* that resonate with "emotional communities," instrumentalizing notions of *"our"* and *"we"* (Rosenwein 2006).

To be "affected" also means to be *moved*. In this sense, affect is deeply imbricated with the politics of controlling human movement. Central to this article's thesis is the idea that making certain bodies objects of hate, for instance, justifies the reorganization of social and bodily spaces—through immigration policies and practices—that "recognize" (or racialize) them as "the hated" (Ahmed 2013, 54). This relationship between affect, the politics of representation, racialization, and control over human movement is an instructive conceptual basis of this paper.

I understand affect as a phenomenon that manifests socially—resonating through objects, institutions, histories, images, and relations—gaining meaning through cultural forms and discourse (Ahmed 2004). Emotions like fear are cultivated intersubjectively, producing certain bodies as objects of fear. African migrant men in the U.K. do not inherently carry affective value, but when the media consistently links them to threats—using terms like "waves" to evoke panic or "filth" to incite disgust—these emotions acquire weight. Representations that circulate

widely in the public domain, or what Hall (1997) calls "signs," produce African migrant men as objects of these emotions, embedding them within hegemonic "affective economies" of panic and disgust (cf. (Ahmed 2004). Affective economies, like currency, gain meaning as emotions circulate, rather than being inherent to specific objects or signs. These economies align bodily space with social space, mediating the relationship between the individual and the collective. As affects circulate politically, they form networks of sedimented yet dynamic meaning about collective bodies across time-space, carrying social force and political power.

My attention to the mutually constitutive relationship between media's representational practices, the affect economies they generate, and state immigration policies is particularly instructive, given the limited attention affect has received as a particular politics of the state and media (Tazreiter 2015, 101; Stoler 2008; Laszczkowski and Reeves 2017). Yet affect plays a crucial role in how states categorize subjects, assign blame and responsibility, and articulate political stakes. States generate boundaries between "natives" and "strangers," embedding emotions in institutional logics often executed as if dispassionate or rational. My concern is with this non-rational state force, or the "Affective State" (Stoler 2008), not in opposition to the state's instrumental functions, but as a critical counterpart (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015). In this sense, this article explores the relationship between U.K. media discourse and state policies while considering how affect produces observable political effects. It asks: What do these affective economies enable politically? What "public emotions" are elicited by the affective state, and to what end?

While necropolitics—the politics of state-engineered death-making—is well established (Mbembe 2019), this article contributes to this theorization by exploring how affect is used to justify the routine deaths of Black bodies deemed "deathworthy." Or, more pointedly I ask: what role does affect play in manufacturing gratuitous violence that casts Black bodies as disposable, condemned to premature death? (Gilmore 2007; Sharpe 2016; Vergès 2021).

In attending to these provocations, we must think historically about how Black life is shaped by afterlives that normalize premature Black death (Hartman 2008). Affect is enacted in a historical context where racial and colonial power relations persist. As Ahmed (2013, 45) so incisively reminds us, emotions move sideways between figures and *backward*, reopening past associations. Therefore, the newspapers I read reveal *historically contingent* affective dimensions that British elites reimagine and redeploy to justify immigration policies, drawing from a repertoire of colonial knowledge. Certain bodies can be produced as racialized objects of emotions through revised colonial scripts drawn from historical encounters with the "racialized other."

This oft-overlooked yet crucial entanglement of affective economies, the historical consciousness they rely on, and the policies they justify is central to what this article theoretically and methodically contributes to the study of politics, immigration, and race.

Watching and Listening to Images

Despite the pivotal role of visual imagery in shaping public perceptions and influencing migration policies, critical discourse analysis over the last sixty years has

largely focused on verbal narratives, often neglecting the visual (Wang 2014, 265). Critical visuality however is at the center of struggles waged over "who is to be represented" and how (Mirzoeff 2006, 76; Chouliaraki and Stolic 2017). Since the early nineteenth century, visuality has been deeply invested in Western hegemony, functioning as a colonial technology of domination indispensable to how political elites manufacture categories of difference and mark these categorizations as self-evident or natural. In this way, images are entangled in sustaining coloniality and related racisms. In fact, coloniality has relied on visuality to reinforce its application of force.

Moreover, if we consider coloniality's temporal logics—by which I mean, human existence is shaped by multiple and fractured temporalities—or what Sharpe (2016, 13) calls, "the past, not yet past, in the present," then visuality does not simply progress from one form to another. Instead, traces of past visualities linger and can be revived unexpectedly. This prompts us to ask: what might we perceive differently if we acknowledge how images are steeped in histories? What kinds of viewing relations would emerge? What insights might we gain if we attune ourselves to the sensorial textures these images index and hold? We might begin to see—even hear and feel—how histories reverberate in contemporary images of Black migrant subjects (Campt 2017). We might also uncover a multi-sensorial language that explains how these subjects are construed as *deathworthy*.

With this temporal and sensorial logic in mind, this article is attentive to how UK popular print media and policymakers retrieve these historical visual repositories and refashion them to both conceal histories and justify the violence inflicted on Black bodies, hailing publics to endorse or even engage in that violence.

I employ critical visuality to explore how, and with what intended effect, popular print media publish images that depict migrant subjects. One might say that the image often "arrives" *before* the words, securing the narrative before the reader even begins to engage with the text (Cole 2016). As Johnson (2011, 1017) reminds us in her study of the histories of contemporary images of refugees, "it is through the dynamics of representation—of rendering certain constructions visible and legible in the public sphere—that the categories that shape our social world are made meaningful."

Additionally, visual regimes and their affective frequencies play a crucial role in influencing the basis for social and political actions. These frequencies are particularly salient in both reifying and challenging assumptions about Black bodies. This article is thus keenly attuned to the affective qualities of images of Black bodies and their relationship to policies that seek to contain, expel, or abandon Black people to premature death.

Drawing on the persuasive and groundbreaking theories of Azoulay (2008) on Palestinian noncitizens of Israel and Campt (2017) on women in Western societies and Black Atlantic cultural formations, this article challenges the conventional equation of viewing with knowing. Instead, it advances radical interpretive possibilities of *watching* and *listening* to images. Through this approach, I aim to cultivate a practice of more-than-looking that bears witness to the brutality inflicted on Black life.

Azoulay (2008, 8) inscribes temporal and spatial logics by advocating for *watching* images. She insists that photographs, embedded in histories (and I would add, signaling desired futures), arise from complex political interactions between the viewer, the camera, the subject, and the photographer. This interconnectedness

demands a shift from passive observation to "participatory citizenship," which acknowledges a shared commitment to confronting the injustices depicted—recognizing that these injustices also implicate the viewer. By adopting a civic-minded stance, we engage in viewing relations that move beyond organizing frames like "pity" or "compassion." Instead, we focus on the historical and political contexts and implications of the events portrayed, as well as the political and ethical demands the images place upon us.

Similarly, Campt (2017, 6–7) invites us to engage with images as "haptic objects," demanding a sensory approach that goes beyond visual perception to include listening—attuning our meaning-making to the subtle affective dimensions, multiple temporalities, and historically contingent "unspoken [power] relations" embedded within. This approach requires us to tune our senses to the ways in which photographs resonate, facilitate, and solidify categories of difference over time and across audiences. While images may not speak, Campt (2017) suggests, they nevertheless invite a form of listening. Like other scholars who explore images that are not meant to represent Black subjects but rather to "delineate . . . degraded forms of personhood," Campt (2017) offers an approach to critical visuality that recognizes it as a multisensory and embodied practice, attentive to both the fragility and potential of Black life.

Adopting this feminist mode of visuality allows us to apprehend the oppressive structures that visual representations of Black migrant subjects often rely on, transforming these representations into tools for resisting the violences inflicted on "others," and, by extension, the violences perpetuated against us all.

Methodology

This methodology moves beyond the binary frameworks of modernity/coloniality, which reinforce distinctions such as "quantitative" versus "qualitative" and "reason" versus "emotion." As Escobar (2024) describes, these are not just categorizations but ontological dualisms—a philosophical framework that not only divides the world into binaries but also establishes hierarchies between them. Instead, this methodology gestures toward possibilities for other modes of thinking, knowing, and sensing the politics of race and migration, as well as practices of representation and state-engineered death-making.

It weaves together an assemblage of multi-methods, including statistical linguistic readings of a large corpus (Gabrielatos and Baker 2008); historically informed and race-critical discursive-affective readings (Ahmed 2013; Wodak and Meyer 2015; Loomba 2015); critical visuality that engages a more expansive sensorial intelligence and politics (Azoulay 2008; Campt 2017; Mirzoeff 2015); and visualization techniques that map affective, racial, and gendered knowledge manufactured by U.K. popular print media, referred to as "affective-racialized networks." The following sections provide an overview of the methodology, followed by a discussion of the significance of the networks and how to interpret them.

Sample and Sampling

The newspapers examined—*The Daily Mail, The Sun,* and *The Daily Mirror*—are among Britain's most widely read and politically influential, collectively reaching

over 9 million readers in 2016 ("National Readership Survey" 2016). They also reflected different political affiliations at the time: *The Sun* and *Daily Mail* supported the Conservative Party, while *The Daily Mirror* backed the Labour Party in the 2015 general elections.

This study also includes discursive-affective analysis of key immigration policies, particularly Theresa May's "Hostile Environment" package, outlined in the Immigration Acts of 2014 and 2016, and the decision to defund the Mediterranean rescue operation, *Operation Mare Nostrum*. It also covers related ministerial statements and Home Office press releases (See Appendix).

Using the search terms "migrant," "asylum seeker," "refugee," and "immigrant" (collectively referred to as MASRI), I compiled a corpus of 3,933 newspaper articles (~2,276,000 words). I applied corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) to identify broad linguistic patterns and conducted a detailed critical analysis of a 350-article sample to understand how these groups were represented.

I applied a historically informed critical analysis to the sample of articles and policy documents to understand how MASRI subjects were described and what was suggested in terms of their presence. I identified expressed emotions, or what affective scholars refer to as "emotion talk," such as "the lorry drivers were panicked by the migrants," and invoked emotions or "emotional talk," where words stand in for emotions (Niemeier and Dirven 1997). For example, in *The Daily Mirror,* the arrival of migrants was described as a "summer of *anarchy*," a phrase likely to evoke panic or fear in readers. Lastly, I used critical visuality to read images that accompanied articles.

The Salience of Collocation Analysis and Onto-epistemologies

Ahmed (2013, 90) argues that words become ingrained through repetition, like a form of signing: "signs become "sticky" through repetition." This "stickiness" shapes how "difference" is represented. When these representations recur across multiple texts, they create "intertextuality," where the meaning of one text is shaped by others (Allen 2011). Repeated use of specific language across publications forms a "regime of representation," reinforcing power dynamics and inequalities (Hall 1997).

In other words, if certain ideas are consistently emphasized over time, they can prime readers to associate these ideas, even when they aren't explicitly mentioned *together* (Stubbs 1994). For instance, because "immigrant" and "illegal" were frequently paired in articles, readers could be primed to think of "illegal immigrant" whenever they encountered the term "immigrant." This is where the notion of onto-epistemologies becomes crucial. I suggest that the representation of migrant subjects in print media and policies is deeply intertwined with perceptions of their "inherent nature." So much so that terms like "immigrant," when repeatedly linked with descriptors like "illegal," begin to signify specific and distinct characteristics of *all* "immigrants."

To determine whether a regime of representation was evident across UK popular print media, I applied collocation analysis to the corpus. This method uses grammatical rules and statistical tests to identify the co-occurrence of words with a frequency greater than chance (Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992; Gabrielatos and Baker 2008). In simpler terms, these are words that frequently appear together and,
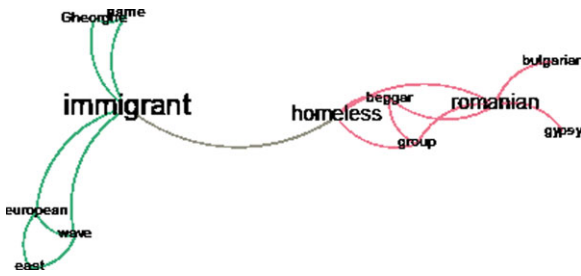
Figure 1. Homeless immigrants rise, (The Sun 2013).

when combined, convey a *specific* meaning—such as the phrase "illegal immigrant." Collocation analysis is crucial because it reveals how certain ideas become associated with specific words, reflecting the key messages print media aim to communicate to their readers.

Mapping Affective-Racialized Networks

While collocation analysis is commonly used in media representation research and often presented in tabular form, this paper visualizes collocation analysis (or the politically salient ways MASRIs were portrayed) across the corpus, using a force-directed algorithm (See Figure 1).

Visualization is a powerful heuristic tool across disciplines, valued for its ability to clarify complex relational datasets (Venturini, Jacomy, and Jensen 2021). Visualizing collocation in this way revealed the relational patterns of the most frequently used vocabulary ("linguistic co-occurrences") in each newspaper, shedding light on the linguistic frameworks within which these publications articulate migration politics. Additionally, the way MASRIs were discursively grouped, related, and differentiated within and across the publications—the onto-epistemologies—became visible and revealed what would have otherwise remained obscured (See Figure 2 and Appendix).

Visualizing these linguistic relationships enabled me to recognize the racial, gendered, sexualized, and classed dimensions that were deployed and that could be used to justify state policies. Critically, I was able to discern an intertextuality across papers, where they consistently reaffirmed epistemes of threat and ascribed them to racial and gendered subjects. Young "African," "North African"/ "Arab Muslim," and "Eastern European" men were frequently associated with notions of invasion or "cultural" contamination (e.g., "Muslim gang"), illegality (e.g., "illegal immigrant"), criminality (e.g., "foreign criminal"), and being "bogus" asylum seekers (e.g., "failed asylum seeker"). Perhaps most importantly, by visualizing this network of commonly associated words, I was able to see how MASRI onto-epistemologies also mobilized specific emotions and generated affective economies (See Figure 3).

Interpreting Racialized-Affective Networks

In a force-directed algorithm, the position of a word is determined by a physical simulation where "nodes" (descriptors) repel each other, and "edges" (connecting lines) pull them together based on their co-occurrence in articles about MASRIs.
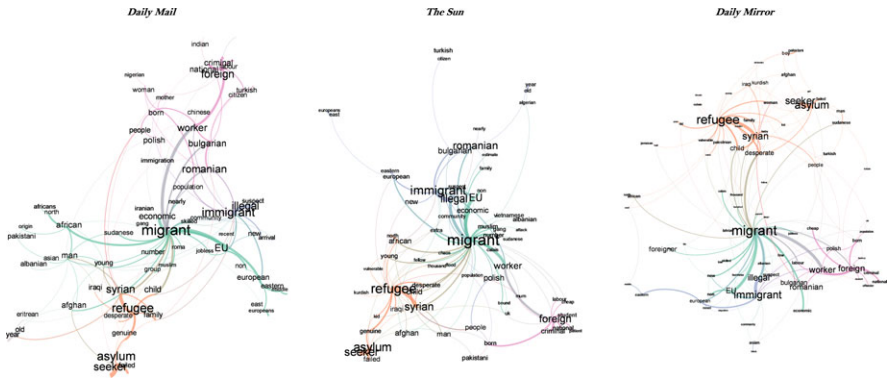
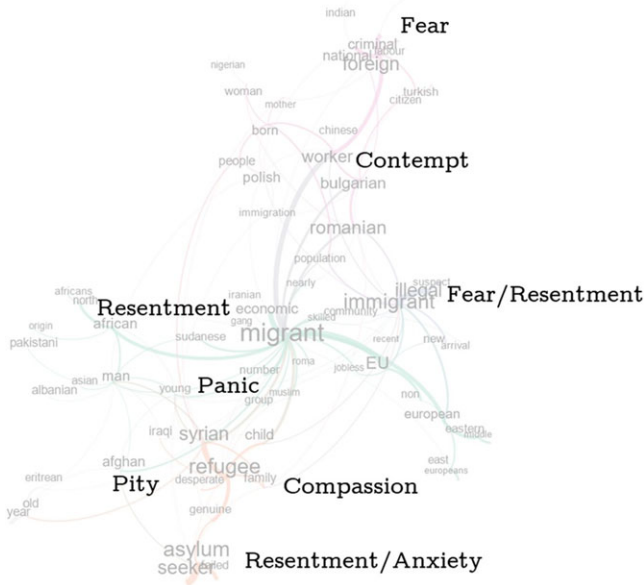**Figure 2.** Affective-racialized networks.

Figure 3. Affective-racialized networks and affective economies. The Daily Mail (2013-2016).

The frequency with which terms appear together influences the dynamics of the simulation until it reaches an "equilibrium state," resulting in a visually meaningful and interpretable relationship between nodes (Venturini, Jacomy, and Jensen 2021). If "economic" is close to "migrant," it shows that these terms frequently appeared together as "economic migrant." In contrast, terms farther apart were less often linked. For instance, *The Daily Mirror* was more likely to pair "refugee" with "child" than "migrant" with "child," reflecting different lexical emphases across publications.

Network density also reveals patterns of representation (See Appendix). Constellations of words that are more tightly "knit" together and larger in size
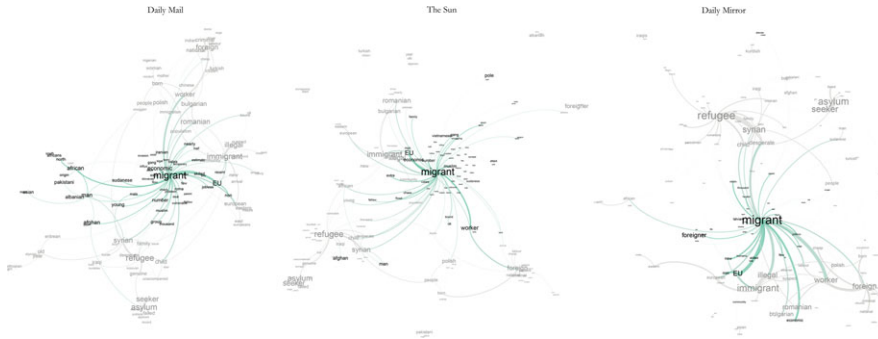
Figure 4. Migrant onto-epistemologies.

indicate more stereotypical representations. *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun* show far larger and more proximate words than *The Daily Mirror*. This indicates that *Daily Mail* and *Sun* readers were more likely to encounter stereotypical associations, such as linking "Syrian" closely with "refugee." However, an intertextuality and regime of representation still emerges, as *The Daily Mirror* shares similar "onto-epistemological communities" with the other publications.

Perhaps most interestingly, these "onto-epistemological communities" evoke affective economies. For instance, the phrase "genuine refugee" might elicit a sense of pity or compassion in readers towards those repeatedly labeled as refugees (e.g., "families," "Syrian(s)," and "child(ren)") (See Figure 3).

Finally, a modularity algorithm categorizes the network into color-coded clusters to highlight common groupings, while the thickness of the edges indicates the strength of association between words, even if they aren't in the same cluster.

Migrant Onto-epistemology

For the purposes of this article, I focus on how resentment, panic, anxiety, and disgust were generated as affective economies illustrated through the "migrant onto-epistemology" (See Figure 4). "Migrant" emerged as the predominant search term, used in over 50% of the articles across all studied publications. My close discursive-affective reading specifically includes three articles (one of which contains images) where "migrant" was a focal term, and a series of Home Office press releases that rationalize the defunding of *Mare Nostrum* and related policies.

Stoking Panic, Producing Disgust

The migrant onto-epistemology portrays why migrants sought asylum in the UK, emphasizing economic motives over political ones, with the premise that these reasons are mutually exclusive. Common collocates such as "economic," "jobless," "low-skilled," "unskilled," and "worker" frequently appeared in contexts that distinguished "genuine asylum seekers" from "economic migrants"(*The Sun* 2015b). These framings marked "migrants" as excessively agential, uncoerced economic

subjects (distinct from political subjects of persecution) who intended to work in "low-skilled" jobs.

This discourse has two significant implications. First, the idea of "waiting for the bogus" suggests that distinguishing between "economic migrants" and "genuine asylum seekers" is difficult, raising fears that *they* might integrate into *our* community undetected. In this context, the concept of "passing" serves to legitimize recurring violence against "other" bodies, all under the guise of protecting the nation from *potential* threats.

Secondly, the discourse of "choice" de-historicizes the ways in which colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary migration to the UK, mirroring how the British Empire used racial categories to control mobility in and out of colonized territories. It obscures how "regimes of recognition" perpetuate Britain's colonial and racial order, selectively restricting the entry of certain *nationalities* often pejoratively labeled as "migrants" (El-Enany 2020). As Mongia (2018, 113) observes, the "blurring of the vocabularies of nationality and race is a founding strategy of the modern nation-state." British immigration laws today sustain the global racial hierarchy established by colonialism—particularly the British Empire—systematically excluding the racialized poor from the spoils of colonialism, now safely secured within former colonial nation-states (Achiume 2009; El-Enany 2020).

It's important to elaborate on how emotions like disgust and anxiety played a central role in justifying these policies rooted in coloniality. For example, the UK Home Office's push to further militarize the sea and reduce funding for search-and-rescue operations in 2014 was part of a broader regime anchored in policies of "deterrence" and externalization. At the heart of externalization is the concept of "containment development," which ostensibly aims to improve living standards in "source countries" while keeping migrants *in place*. In reality, these practices effectively outsourced the containment of migrant subjects to third countries, reinforcing and extending European borders. They were also fundamentally about keeping migrants out of sight, operating on the implicit assumption that Black male bodies are revolting objects to be kept at a distance.

Distinct from typical detention and expulsion policies, this UK bordering regime sought to prevent Black bodies from even reaching European and British shores by supposedly addressing the "root causes of illegal migration" (Home Office 2015b). Deterrence policies, as outlined in various government communications, aimed to debunk myths about life in the UK and inform migrants about asylum options in France to discourage their journey. The Immigration Bill (2013) explicitly sought to "make the UK the least attractive destination for illegal immigrants" (UK Visas and Immigration 2016). Externalization policies included cooperation with "transit countries in North, East, and West Africa" to "stabilize countries from which migrants were coming" as part of a strategy to manage migration "upstream"(Prime Minister's Office, 2016). Specific measures included establishing support centers for migrants in places like Niger and intercepting migrants at sea to return them to Turkey (Prime Minister's Office, 2016).

The representation of migrants as objects of disgust and anxiety in these policies was often subtle. As Keenan (2014, 38) notes, these types of policies "conceptually confirm [. . .] a former colonial power's status as a space of modernity, cultural tolerance, and political superiority, and the country of origin as a space of

primitiveness and inferiority." Disgust was invoked through an implicit sense of the U.K.'s superiority, manifesting in actions of *avoidance* (e.g., "breaking the link" between dangerous Mediterranean journeys and settlement in Europe) and *repulsion* (e.g., returning migrants to Turkey) (Home Office 2015a).

Disgust and anxiety attuned the public to both spatial and temporal absences. Anxiety, with its forward-looking nature, or futurity, created the possibility that the object of anxiety—Black migrant bodies—*might* materialize. Thus, anxiety and disgust became an approach to objects, particularly Africans from "North, East, and West Africa"(Ahmed 2004; Home Office 2015a).

These emotions had real effects, shaping human movement. The state recoiled from Black migrant bodies, creating distance through measures to "strengthen security," avoid encouraging "unaccompanied children," or to "stop the problem at the source"(Home Office 2016). Such policies directly contributed to deaths at sea. State power relied on manufacturing "abject subjects" to constitute itself and establish its borders. Disgust and anxiety created boundaries, aligning some bodies with, and others against the state, defining who belonged and who was excluded. These emotions served indispensable racio-spatial purposes, rendering Black bodies deathworthy.

Manufacturing Fear and Resentment

Obscuring colonial history and its legacies facilitated the portrayal of "migrants" as objects of resentment too, depicted as unfairly taking jobs reserved for "native" residents. Skill-related descriptors, though seemingly neutral, often conceal how race, gender, sexuality, and nationality shape perceptions of who is considered "skilled" (Iskander 2021).

The racial and gendered dimensions of this onto-epistemology are evident through terms like "non-EU," "Sudanese," "West African," "Muslim," and "Arab," which framed migrants predominantly as Black and from the Global South. Terms like "Non-EU" and "Calais" worked to obscure the racial and gendered construction of the migrant. *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun* frequently used "Calais migrant" to evoke images of young African men in Calais as "masses" storming ferries (Ibrahim and Howarth 2016).

"Non-EU," across all publications, subtly racialized the figure as not-properly-white. Though ideas of who "racially" counts as European have become more contested—allowing for partial recognition of Black Europeans *as* Europeans—Europe remains predominantly constructed as a space of whiteness and Christian civilization (Goldberg 2009a). Even without explicitly signaling a racial category, "non-EU" operates as a coded racial grammar, reinforcing the colonial overrepresentation of "Man" as white, European, and fully human (Wynter 2003). Within this framework, the migrant is either a "degenerate" form of whiteness (Anderson 2013; Ivasiuc 2017) or a racialized subject that exists outside the boundaries of full humanity—an enduring function of Blackness within the modern/colonial world (McKittrick 2018). This logic, as Wynter argues, is foundational to Europe's self-definition, wherein whiteness and European identity remain the benchmarks against which all Others are measured, managed, and excluded.

In the *Daily Mirror*, "recent European" signaled a peripheral, Orientalized subject from "Eastern Europe" (Said 1979; Wolff 1994; Ivasiuc 2017). The terms "recent" and "Eastern" effectively separate this space and its people from the rest of Europe, designating them as subaltern to the Western "core," portrayed in newspapers as primitive and violent Others (*Daily Mirror* 2015a). Historically, Europeanness was defined not only by white skin but by notions of "moral behavior" and affective propriety (Stoler 2010). These portrayals, rooted in colonial histories, reinforce British supremacy around ideas of civility and morality. Furthermore, stereotypes of the violent, hypermasculine Communist man symbolize a threat to Western democratic values, national security, and the British welfare state (Connolly 2018).

When age or gender was specified, migrants were often labeled as "young" by the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun*, or as "adult men." Both publications frequently used the term "gangs" to criminalize these groups, portraying them as hypermasculine and sexually deviant. In *The Sun*, phrases like "sex attack" were employed, strategically distinguishing "young" from "child," the latter typically paired with "refugee." Brown (2011) refers to this discursive maneuvering as the "fracturing of childhood," a discourse that criminalizes Black male youth who deviate from "normative" notions of childhood, which is to say, white notions of childhood.

But what kind of subjectivity does this *specific* entanglement produce? The intersection of "young," "adult," and "male" is significant because it invokes colonial and imperial "regimes of truth" about Black masculinities—historically pathologized as inherently deviant, hypersexual, and violent (Saint-Aubin 2002; Pasura and Christou 2018). To be Black, young, adult, and male is to be constructed as a distinct sexualized and violent threat. The production of the Black man as an object of fear, panic, and disgust is sustained by deep historical associations: the savage, the Negro, the knife-wielding Black urban youth (Ahmed 2013; Bhattacharyya et al. 2021). These discursive-affective repositories do not simply reflect stereotypes—they actively condition recognition itself, shaping how the Black male body is seen, feared, and disciplined within racialized structures of power.

The persistent association of Black men and boys with "groups" and "gangs" transforms them into specters of coloniality: Black mobs swiftly en route to Europe. This representation evoked panic and fear, with their supposed sexual deviance and violence triggering resentment and disgust. These portrayals justified their exclusion and racialized expulsion, marking them as incompatible with innocence and vulnerability (Brown 2011; Ticktin 2015; McLaughlin 2018).

Across all three publications, unsanctioned mobility was depicted as contaminating and invasive, often on the brink of violence. In *The Sun* and, to a lesser extent, the *Daily Mirror*, migrants were likened to natural disasters, using terms like "influx," "flow," "tide," "flood," "wave," and "surge"—metaphors suggesting uncontrollable, limitless forces. These portrayals used nature to obscure contested issues of belonging and entitlement (Fischer-Tiné 2017; Comaroff 2017). *The Sun* heightened panic by frequently using words like "mayhem," "blow," "shock," "surge" and "chaos." Frequent quantifiers such as "thousands," "millions," and "hundreds" dramatized the sense of loss over the control of borders. *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun* often depicted young migrant men, "predominantly *single* males," as threatening, linking them to aggression and sexual violence and raising fears

about Muslim migrants with supposedly "different value systems" (*Daily Mail* 2016; *The Sun* 2016).

The term "single" is particularly instructive. It implies these men lack normative families compatible with "British culture," while inciting moral panic about the perceived threat posed by the virile Black male subject to white feminine sexuality. This stirs fears of miscegenation and, consequently, reveals the crisis of white masculinities. Britain's racial and national boundaries have long been inscribed on the bodies of white (bourgeois) women and girls (Tabili 2018). Recently, this notion has materialized in justifications for the "migrant barge" in Dorset, temporarily housing around 500 *single* male asylum seekers on a barge with no engine (Home Office 2023). Imbued with this logic of disgust, the focus on "single adult men" in media discourse and immigration policies echoes imperial British efforts to regulate "undesirable intimacy" (Buettner 2009). Such as through discourses about "undesirable foreigners" in the House of Commons debates which preceded the UK's Aliens Act of 1905; the first policy implemented to control the entry of what were then called "aliens." The metaphor of the nation as a woman extends temporally too, with the perceived threat of reproductive disruption by single Black men seen as endangering "white racial purity" or the white nation, *over time* (Keskinen 2018).

In the wake of Britain's declining global prestige and imperial superiority, the migrant onto-epistemology reveals how newsprint media recurrently associated single adult Black men with cultural loss, political and economic uncertainty, and a sexualized threat—one tied to anxieties about white national reproduction and the perceived vulnerability of white femininity. Cast as objects of panic, anxiety, disgust, and resentment, these migrants symbolized an existential crisis for a British future that was always imagined as "civil" and, above all, white.

Governing Through Panic and Disgust

Here, I analyze articles from 2015, a peak year for publications, from all three outlets: "Swarm Storm: Fury over Cameron gaffe as Calais "summer of anarchy" gets worse" (*Daily Mirror* 2015b) (See Figure 5); "The marauding migrants from Africa threaten our standard of living, says Philip Hammond"(*Daily Mail* 2015); "We care more about Third World than UK" (*The Sun* 2015a).

The *Daily Mirror* presents a chaotic scene of Black men clashing with white armed police officers. The headline "SWARM STORM" (See Figure 5) amplifies panic and fear, using a familiar grammar of Black capture, echoing historical representations of Black fugitivity and banal expressions of white violence. The grainy, blurry image heightens the sense of disorder, reinforcing tension between escape and capture. Smaller photos of Black men scaling fences intensify the fear of invasion, inviting readers to think, "they are coming."

Although the article critiques PM Cameron's use of "swarm," it paradoxically reinforces the metaphor by pairing it with "storm" in the headline. Evoking natural disasters and zoomorphic metaphors, the language incites panic, suggesting invasion and violence (Fischer-Tiné 2017; Saint-Aubin 2002; Kolb 2021). This constructs the nation as unable to cope with these "others," reinforcing notions of contamination and threat. The term "storm" implies chaos and destruction, while

Figure 5. "Swarm storm" (Daily Mirror 2015b).

the verb "to storm" conveys aggression and uncontrollable anger. The language and visuals thus portray migrants as unruly aggressors, both menacing and *audible*. Militarized language describes the men as "attackers" and police as engaged in "battle" during a "night of chaos," heightening the sense of besiegement and justifying surveillance and scrutiny.

In *Daily Mail*'s "The marauding migrants from Africa," the terms "marauding" and "Africa" evoke criminality and primitivism, reinforcing dehumanizing archetypes of especially African masculinity (Ouzgane 2005; Gottzén, Mellström,

and Shefer 2019). Hammond, then Foreign Secretary, expresses concern about Europe's ability to "protect itself" if "millions" of African migrants are absorbed, amplifying fears of criminality and disorder. He instrumentalizes how a surge of videos at the time depicted the Calais "jungle" as a "violent and dissonant space" of mostly young African and Arab *men* (Ibrahim and Howarth 2016). As such, Black migrant men are framed as objects of disgust, posing a threat to the "civilized" spaces of white, wealthy bodies.

The Sun (2015a) invokes similar colonial-racial tropes, describing migrants as "desperate runaways" and as "waifs and strays," from "failed, war-ravaged" nations, emphasizing their repugnant nature and disposability. In *Swarm Storm*, Black men are depicted as contaminating life-saving medical supplies, reinforcing their dehumanization. As hooks (2014, 2) observes, such portrayals reinforce racial superiority by casting Black subjects as objects of disgust, justifying their expulsion and showing how disgust plays a pivotal role in maintaining social hierarchies. The Daily Mail (2015) echoes this, urging the return of migrants to their countries of origin.

Beyond familiar tropes of invasion, contamination, and violence, a deeper discursive-affective reading reveals how these articles repurpose colonial vocabularies of Black masculinities. This language, pervasive in 20th-century British colonial discourse, constructs Black bodies as inherently dangerous and diseased (Saint-Aubin 2002; Fischer-Tiné 2017; Kolb 2021). The imagery in "Swarm Storm," with a police officer casually spraying fleeing migrants, exemplifies how these visual and discursive constructions intersect with state practices. As Ticktin (2017) notes, "the language of invasiveness erases ontological distinctions, confusing the eradication of disease with the eradication of people." This grammar re-inscribes the colonial trope of "teeming uncivilized and diseased natives," urging readers to see violence against Black male bodies as justified. These images—of Black men fleeing, evading capture, and facing racialized expulsion—are framed by coloniality. The contemporary structure, not just the "event," of colonialism resonates in the images, headlines, and captions.

We need not look as far back as colonial times to grasp the power of these racial and gendered representations of young Black men though. The specter of young Black British working-class urban "gangs"—characterized by an uncontainable, deviant masculinity—has animated British public imagination and fueled racialized anxieties since at least the 1960s (Bhattacharyya, 2021). Recent riots across the UK, sparked by false claims that the Southport stabber was a Muslim asylum seeker who had arrived by boat, starkly illustrate how affects of resentment and anger toward young Black men and boys remain pervasive. While social media played a significant role in spreading disinformation, traditional media outlets like the BBC also contributed by emphasizing the alleged attacker's Rwandan heritage (Aljazeera 2024).

These subtle invocations of unbelonging rely on racial mythologies that frame Black men and boys as existential threats to notions of *English*, less so British, civility and values. In contemporary discourse, Britishness has become a more contested term, allowing for qualifiers such as "Black British" or "Asian British" in popular understandings of race, such as in the census (Rickard 2011). However, as Hall (2000, 109) reminds us, "Englishness has always carried a racial signature." The

decline of the Empire, with Brexit as its most spectacular recent manifestation, has not led to the overcoming of the "English imperial complex" but rather has fueled a defensive English nationalism that still equates Englishness with whiteness (Virdee and McGeever 2018, 1811; Nye 2017).

"our bodies became deadweight"
~**Wadud,** (2019, 23)

These discursive-affective constructions have concrete political effects, mobilizing anxiety over insecurity, national identity, and cultural difference. These portrayals also evoke nostalgia for Empire through policy discourses like "Global Britain," serving racially exclusionary political agendas, while seeking to meet market interests (Virdee and McGeever 2018; Saunders 2020).

The portrayal of uncontrolled movements of Black men fueled fear and panic, justifying swift and harsh responses by the "panicked state" (Fischer-Tiné 2017). After *Operation Mare Nostrum* ended in 2014—partly due to the UK Government—European authorities, via Frontex, intensified border management, criminalized maritime NGO rescue operations, and prioritized surveillance over humanitarian efforts (Lloyd-Damnjanovic 2020). Operations like *Triton* and *Sophia,* operating with reduced budgets and no search-and-rescue mandates, resulted in increased crossings and rises in deaths (Varrella 2021; IOM 2020).

The University of London's "Death by Rescue" report highlights how "institutionalized neglect" shifted rescue responsibilities to ill-equipped merchant ships, increasing the loss of life (Oceanography 2016). EU agencies weaponized reduced rescues as "deterrents," despite evidence that punitive measures do not curb asylum seeker mobility (Düvell, Cherti, and Lapshyna 2013). Frontex's 2016 Risk Analysis outlines how Syrian, Afghani, and West African "young single men" were separated from other supposedly more "vulnerable" groups, for different treatment (Frontex 2016, 45). Consequently, the EU orchestrated a *racial* crisis, with countless Black lives lost, underscoring the deadly impact of these affective and discursive strategies.

Conclusion: Borderless Blackness, Affect, and the Politics of Death

"If one began from Black"
~ **Sharpe** (2023, 234)

To understand racialization and human movement today, we must first confront the limitations of colonial vocabularies and epistemologies that sustain antiblack violence (Wynter 2003; da Silva 2007). As Black and African feminists argue, dismantling these regimes requires rejecting the conceptual architectures that uphold them (Lorde 2007; Lewis and Baderoon 2021). This paper advances an interdisciplinary, decolonial, and queer feminist approach that critically rethinks how race, borders, and death-making are constructed, showing that to meaningfully engage with these issues, we must begin by shifting our analytical frames.

A relational approach to race is particularly vital in revealing how racial practices transcend geopolitical and temporal boundaries. My analysis of UK media and immigration policies during the European "refugee crisis," along with my use of "deathworthy"—which extends beyond the carceral and U.S. context—demonstrates that racial logics are not confined to nation-states but instead operate

through transnational circuits of meaning, power, and governance. These racial formations are mutually affecting and reinforcing, shaping how Black bodies are marked for exclusion, violence, and ultimately, premature death.

I insist that we begin from Black. Deploying Blackness in migration studies research resists modernity's onto-epistemological categories, which rely on separability—such as "Brown" from "Black"—as a means of structuring racial hierarchies and imperial governance. By framing Blackness not merely as an identity but as a political and epistemological tool, this study reveals how Europe's border regimes—and European citizenship itself—function by exiling Blackness from valued human life, rendering Black death both unremarkable and necessary for the reproduction of white nationhood. As Da Silva incisively argues, "Blackness is a referent to slavery and therefore a referent to the colonial context," (Elg 2021, 115) meaning that its very invocation carries with it multiple temporalities, collapsing past and present into a persistent historical condition. This temporal force underscores how racial subjugation is not an afterlife of modernity but *constitutive* and *expressive* of it (Escobar, Osterweil, and Sharma 2024). These seemingly ontological distinctions between "Brown/Arab" and "Black/African" obscures the shared condition of racial subjugation under imperial bordering regimes, reinforcing a system where degrees of proximity to whiteness dictate political legibility and vulnerability to state violence. Blackness, as an epistemic force, unsettles the very categories through which inclusion and exclusion are determined, exposing the enduring violences of white colonial modernity and unsettling its attempts to render its own histories discontinuous, distant, or resolved (Elg 2021; Akomolafe 2024).

Yet, to think through Blackness and affect *together* disrupts the objectifying logics and ontological dualisms of modernity, which imprison our senses and limit our capacity to make *sense* of our contemporary condition. Affect does not simply reflect representation but circulates through raciality, accumulating and attaching to racialized bodies in ways that sustain political arrangements. Affect theory offers a subversive method of reading racialization, moving beyond rationality to show how emotions—panic, resentment, disgust—are not just cultural expressions but structuring forces embedded in histories of governance. Affect's force lies in its ability to exceed the frameworks through which raciality is made legible, disrupting the colonial order that relies on coherent, governable categories (Da Silva 2014). It is not simply about feeling, but about power—since affect circulates through bodies, media, institutions, and policies, shaping public perceptions, racial constructions, national boundaries, and ultimately, who is deemed deathworthy. The modern/colonial world limits our ability to make sense of contemporary racial violence precisely because it depends on the illusion of coherence, where race appears as a stable, governable category rather than a violent, ongoing process of differentiation and exclusion.

In theorizing affective-racialized networks, this paper has demonstrated how the interplay of emotion, racial mythologies, and media discourse sustains antiblack bordering practices while naturalizing them as commonsense political rationality. In this sense, affect works as a technology of governance, securing the state's ability to justify deterrence, externalization, and the active abandonment of Black single young men to death at sea. This framework challenges migration scholars to take

affect seriously—not as an ephemeral or secondary concern, but as fundamental to the making and maintenance of racialized bordering regimes.

Migration studies, as a field, must also reckon with the full epistemological force of Blackness—not simply as an object of study, but as a critical method that destabilizes how we conceptualize movement, belonging, and state power. Without engaging the onto-epistemic stakes of Blackness, migration research risks reproducing the same colonial logics it seeks to critique. Similarly, without attending to the affective economies that structure raciality, we risk overlooking the ways in which racial violence is not only material, but also deeply felt, circulated, and sedimented into the political imagination. Thinking Blackness and affect together is thus not merely an intellectual exercise—it is an imperative analysis for understanding how racialization works and how Black deaths are made normative.

Bringing Blackness and affect together as an organizing framework also illuminates the generative potentialities of Black fugitivity—an insistence on movement, on political rapture as ongoing practice, and world-making beyond the enclosures of racialized power (Moten and Harney 2013). Black movements—across seas, deserts, dense jungles, and in the underbellies of cargo holds and speeding trains—carry with them the pulse of defiance, the urgency of escape, the speculation of what might be, and the desire for something *more than survival*. These journeys cannot be contained within the limiting legible frames of crisis, securitization, development, or humanitarianism. Instead, they enact insurgent refusals beyond the reach of the state and capital, disrupting the fixity of colonial borders while making speculative leaps—gestures toward a world yet to come. If we dare to look closer, these movements reveal not just revolutionary mobilities but the possibility of a racially just, borderless world.

Notes

1 This article does not explore modes of resistance to these hegemonic discourses, but this should not imply they are insignificant. Nor does it focus on the 'Brexit' Referendum, though the arguments presented are relevant to understanding the affective climate that shaped public attitudes toward asylum-seekers and Black British citizens leading up to the Referendum.

2 While this article focuses on spectacular forms of physical Black death, it rejects a binary view of life and death rooted in Western dualism. Following Radomska, Mehrabi, and Lykke (2020), I acknowledge the links between physical, socio-political, and non-human deaths, but these broader aspects are beyond this article's scope. Instead, the focus here is on the immediate, 'visible' deaths at sea, their affective justifications, and their political implications.

3 Following Lewis and Baderoon (2021) I foreground Decolonial *African* Feminisms to highlight how Black Feminism in the global imaginary is often synonymous with only North American feminist thought, to the occlusion of African feminists. This research, however, is influenced by African diasporic feminist writings from around the world, including scholars based in Africa.

4 My use of feminist onto-epistemologies highlights the deep connection between being (ontology) and knowing (epistemology). This concept, as reflected in affective-racialized networks, underscores how our

understanding and representation of identities are shaped simultaneously by our assumptions about what those identities 'are' and by the knowledge systems that construct and sustain those assumptions.

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Appendix: Policy and Press Release Sampling and Affective-Racialized Networks

1. **Policy and Press Release Sampling**

Sampling of UK Policy Documents: Policies sampled include the 2013 Immigration Bill (2014 Act and updates made in the 2016 Act) as part of Theresa May's (as Home Secretary) flagship immigration package, a "Hostile Environment." For this, I examined the Overview of the 2013 Bill and related Home Office press releases and ministerial statements.

I also examined the Home Office's implementation guidance report on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS).

Finally, in October 2014, the Cameron Administration cut funds for search-and-rescue efforts in the Mediterranean Sea, contributing to *Operation Mare Nostrum's* ("Our Sea") termination. *Mare Nostrum* was a naval operation that the Italian Navy led and financially sponsored by the European Commission, including the U.K. government. This is the last policy discourse I analyze, primarily through Home Office Press releases and ministerial statements relating to this policy.

Sampling UK Press releases: The Home Office is the ministerial department of the U.K. Government responsible for "immigration, security, and law and order." They are central to setting the political agenda and reacting to political events that relate to immigration and issues such as security, where MASRIs are often implicated. A variety of documents were included in my sample; a) ministerial oral or written statements to Parliament, b) "news stories" about official meetings with governments, c) speeches at official political events, and d) press releases.

To gather my sample, I accessed the "News and Communications" section of the website and selected the "Entering and staying in the U.K." filter. This filter allowed me to view a variety of publicly available documents relating to, among other sub-topics, "border control," "immigration rules," "rights of foreign

nationals in the U.K.," and "refugees, asylum, and human rights." The sample was gathered using the same search terms used to assemble the print media corpus: "migrant," "asylum seeker," "refugee," and "immigrant."

Accessing these documents enabled a triangulation of how policies were framed and justified based on more immediate reactions by the U.K. government. Twenty-seven documents were gathered and analyzed.

2.   Affective-Racialized Networks

My study involves a text analysis carried out in programming language called Python for the Corpus Linguistics (CL) component to investigate wide-scale linguistic patterns and trends in three British tabloids; while simultaneously using the more traditional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), most manifest in the close analysis of a sample of texts where I analyzed discursive and affective strategies. CL relies on quantitative approaches performed on large collections of naturally occurring texts stored in a computerized database (i.e., corpus). Such an approach allows for broad trends and patterns to be extracted, analyzed, and visualized.

Calculating collocation analysis: To calculate collocation of words, I looked specifically within the "base noun phrases" that make up MASRI "entities." Base noun phrases are the noun plus the words describing the noun (e.g., illegal migrant men). The collocation analysis is a measure of the frequency of terms being juxtaposed within base noun phrases describing MASRI subjects.

Collocations calculated on the whole corpus represent the discourse for that period, especially the peaks (such as in September 2015) where the number of articles that describe MASRIs was especially high. Some words may be very frequent collocates in some years and non-collocates in others but still feature as collocates across the whole corpus (Gabrielatos and Baker 2008, 11).

Affective-Racialized Network scales: The graph scales have been adjusted so that the frequency is comparable between publications despite the different number of articles they published during the study period. In terms of the number of articles, *Daily Mail* dominates the corpus with over two thousand articles, constituting 52% of the corpus. *The Sun* published almost half of the *Daily Mail*'s articles in the same period, but more than double that of the *Daily Mirror*. The *Daily Mirror* had the least number of articles, representing 13% of the corpus

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, H.O., upon reasonable request.