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Conflating the Muslim refugee and the terror suspect: responses to the Syrian refugee “crisis” in Brexit Britain

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ABSTRACT
The Syrian refugee “crisis” has prompted contradictory responses of securitization of European borders on the one hand, and grassroots compassion on the other, that posit a universal conception of the human deserving of equal rights to safety irrespective of racial or religious difference. However, in the aftermath of the 2015 and 2016 Paris terror attacks there has been a backlash against refugees amid fears of Islamist terrorists exploiting refugee channels to enter Europe, as well as an upsurge in a populist nationalism framing Brexit and anti-Muslim hostility following recent UK terror attacks. I argue that the convergence of the “Muslim refugee” and the “terror suspect” as threatening mobilizes a racialized biopolitics present in intersecting counter-terrorism and asylum regimes that prioritise security concerns above human rights. I advance the Concentrationary Gothic as a framework for understanding continuities in logics of racial terror framing the “Muslim question” within the Syrian refugee “crisis.”

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Introduction: racial terror and the refugee

The introduction of the 1951 Refugee Convention associated with the “Age of Rights” following the horrors of World War Two recognised human rights as foundational issues whereby, at least officially, refugees’ struggles for freedom should be accommodated within democratic societies (Marfleet 2012, 69). A new epoch had emerged which Rousset (1946) coined the “concentrationary universe” to capture the terrors of totalitarian rule in which “everything is possible” (141). For Rousset, the concentrationary universe characterized the extension of an existing political system based on terror in which its victims are vanquished of social humanity but which was not confined within it (Pollock and Silverman 2011, 18). The concentration
camp is emblematic of this universe but it also references the society of which the camp is an instrument (Pollock and Silverman 2014, 3). The concentrationary provides a “historical and conceptual tool” (Pollock and Silverman 2011, 3) that is useful for drawing (dis)continuities between systems of terror and how they are racialized. Explicitly realized in Nazi Germany, the concentration camp has precedents within colonial contexts and subsequent manifestations that require that we be vigilant to signs of its recurrence (Arendt 1979; Gilroy 2000; Pollock and Silverman 2011, 13). The concentrationary is coextensive with the politico-juridical development of the normalization of the state of exception (Agamben 1998; Mbembe 2003; Razack 2008).

In my advancement of the Concentrationary Gothic as a framework for examining the mechanisms of racial terror (Abbas 2013, forthcoming), I argue that the concentrationary as a prism for understanding the operation of racial terror in states of exception and other structures of domination (Pollock and Silverman 2011, 14, 2014, 2–3) works in conjunction with practices of Gothicisation in support of white dominance (Abbas 2013). I follow Mighall’s (1999, xviii) historical approach to the Gothic as representing the culture stigmatized as “uncivilized, unprogressive or ‘barbaric.’” As explored elsewhere, “this representation shifts depending on the current socio-political and cultural attitudes so that at certain historical junctures, people (as well as institutions and places) are ‘Gothicized,’” (Abbas 2013, unpaginated) that is; “they have the Gothic thrust upon them” (Mighall 1999: xxv) and by contrast, the “civilized self” (Punter and Byron 2003, 5) is defined.

Whilst acknowledging my debt to Said’s (2003) Orientalism for understanding how European constructions of the colonized as inferior served purposes of domination, I argue that “racial gothic” (Malchow 1996, 2) provides a more useful vocabulary for exploring racial and cultural difference as unnatural. This is because it draws from parallel discourses of the human sciences, anthropology, and biology to articulate how categories of sub/human are constructed and contested and are tied to registers of hygiene and circuits of affective repulsion that are cogently expressed through Gothic tropes of the monster or monstrous, hauntings and the spectral, and abjected states. Attention to Gothic discourses alerts us to how human rights are subsumed within systems of racial terror that are significant for understanding the “Muslim question” and its articulation within a historical trajectory of terror against racialized others (Abbas 2013, forthcoming).

The Concentrationary Gothic foregrounds how Gothic discourses are used to support racialized biopolitics involved in practices of governance and dominance that comprise nation construction and exclusion, racial profiling and screening/surveillance practices, spatial control, restrictions to freedom of speech and political engagement, and production of internal divisions within the oppressed group. Elsewhere I applied the Concentrationary Gothic framework to examine the terrors of counter-terrorism measures experienced by British Muslims within the “war on terror” context (Abbas...
2013, forthcoming). Here I use the Concentrationary Gothic framework to show how similar mechanisms have been deployed during the Syrian refugee “crisis.” I approach the UK government’s Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS) as an example of racial biopolitics that is part of a wider shift in focus from human rights to security in the treatment of asylum seekers (Huysmans 1995; Weber and Bowling 2004).

The article also examines two case studies which provide insight of how the Brexit context shapes articulations of the Syrian refugee through two Gothic discourses: firstly, “reverse colonisation,” that expresses terrors of the purportedly “civilised” world being invaded by “primitive forces” (Arata 1990, 623; also Brantlinger 1988, 229) through analysis of the Breaking Point poster (see Pitcher this issue) used during the EU referendum campaign. The Gothic has persistently put to work anxieties about national identity as Schmitt (1997, 3) writes, whereby “the threat of invasion from without produces Englishness from within,” thus invoking a virulent reassertion of Englishness. The poster draws on fears of the English being displaced so that “England itself becomes an alien nation” (Schmitt 1997, 3).

Secondly, the “discourse of degeneration” (Byron 2000, 132) through my advancement of the phantom “man-child” as a recent iteration of the deceitful Arab that draws together anxieties of the refugee violating Britain’s hospitality and the Islamist terrorist who transgresses Britain’s borders to enact atrocities against her inhabitants. I refer to the Home Office’s commitment to resettling “vulnerable” children from the Calais camp known as the “Jungle” following its dissolution in October 2016 as part of the Dublin III agreement included in the Immigration Act 2016 which recognizes the human rights of refugee children with close family in the UK to be reunited. Vociferous debates accompanying this move around determining the ages of child refugees to be resettled provides another important instance of the operation of the human rights-security nexus and ways in which categories of the “human” and what is “humane” are contested. The discourse of degeneration present in fin de siècle Gothic texts is concerned with defining the contours of a culture “in crisis.” It provides a counterpoint to scientific rigour and certainty by articulating fears of the “dissolution of the nation, of society, of the human subject itself” (Byron 2000, 133) and by contrast, the desire to identify and contain what is “unfixed, transgressive, other and threatening” (Byron 2000, 133) by demanding there “be a boundary” (Glover 1996, 71, original italics). Here, the “man-child” troubles attempts to classify and order bodies (Hurley 1996; Wagner 2012) and secure national borders by exposing the limits of science for determining the ages of asylum seekers and status as il/legitimate.

**Context: Brexit Britain**

Political mobilization of a populist rhetoric vilifying immigration repeatedly used by Brexiters during the EU referendum campaign in Britain emboldened
the enactment of white nationalist sentiments (Mandaville 2017) previously contained beneath a veneer of acceptance towards Britain’s racial minorities. Brexit raises particular questions concerning the relationship between Britain and Europe where the “Muslim question” is a significant political pawn, both in terms of refashioning British identity according to what Hage (1998) terms a “white nation fantasy,” and implementing increasingly exclusionary border controls. Bordering has been central to Brexit with leave supporters expressing desire to “take back control” of Britain’s borders. The argument runs that Britain could regain its powers as an autonomous sovereignty and avoid the responsibilities of membership to a global community.

Issues surrounding British identity and perceived failure of multiculturalism have often coalesced around the “Muslim question.” Muslim communities are charged with bearing social ills of threats to national security and identity through self-segregation or “parallel lives” (Cantle 2001) post the 2001 disturbances in the north of England. More recently, Muslims have been accused of harbouring “regressive attitudes” (Casey Review 2016, 128). This articulation illustrates intersections of Gothic and racial discourses by associating Muslims with retrograde religious practices deemed incompatible with “modern Britain.”

Politicization of demands for integration of which the Muslim is currently presented as the most troubling interloper, is reflected in racially charged public and policy debates which have taken on a violent impetus. The killing of MP Jo Cox (see Jones this issue), a passionate campaigner for refugees who was also working on a report with Tell MAMA on the rise of Islamophobia and aggressive nationalism (Independent, 20 June, 2016), illustrates the dangers of exclusionary border tactics when taken to their perverse limits. Her killer, Thomas Mair, had kept newspaper printings of her pro-remain position and support for refugees (Tell MAMA 2017, 13) and allegedly shouted “Britain First” during the attack – a far right organization which campaigns against multiculturalism and perceived “Islamisation” of Britain. As observed by TUC (2016) in their action plan for tackling increased racism and xenophobia following the 23 June 2016 referendum result, the campaign was characterized “by highly divisive rhetoric and sensationalist appeals to racial and national sentiment,” that by conflating issues of immigration, the so-called “refugee crisis” in Europe and Islamic terrorism, encouraged resentment towards new and settled minority ethnic groups, and Muslims in particular.

Contemporary examinations of racial politics require paying attention to the particular ways in which Muslims are positioned as threatening bodies, both within the nation’s borders and transnationally through a chain of signification which draws together anxieties concerning the immigrant, the refugee, and the terror suspect (Weber and Bowling 2004). In Britain, focus on Muslims as an internal security threat, most cogently depicted by the “home-grown-terrorist” category has dictated public expressions of terrorism
since the 2005 London bombings. However, questions of Muslim loyalty have shifted during the Syrian conflict as British-born Muslims have travelled to fight alongside IS or Daesh in Syria (Awan and Guru 2017; Silverman 2017) including, as with the Manchester bomber, Salman Abedi, returning to enact violence at home having received training in Syria which has important implications for the perceptions of refugees from Syria and the region. The Muslim Other invokes the Gothic’s concern with the disruption of spatial boundaries through association with globally diffuse terror networks as well as depictions of asylum seekers as threats to national security which feature in discourses of public protection and punishment (Valier 2002, 322). This article explores parallels between the securitization of Muslims within the “war on terror” context and construction of Syrian refugees as threats.

The Syrian refugee “crisis” has prompted contradictory responses of securitization of European borders on the one hand, and grassroots compassion on the other. The 2014 VPRS was implemented in response to “considerable pressure” (House of Commons 2017, 9) from charities, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and Houses of Parliament, and extended in 2015 to resettle 20,000 refugees from the Syrian region by 2020. Concerns ensued about their ability to integrate within western secular nations (Selby and Beaman 2016, 8). The 2015 Cologne sexual attacks and robberies on New Year’s eve were problematically attributed to new Muslim migrant and refugee populations (Kingsley 2015; Ataç, Rygiel, and Stierl 2016, 528; Hoffmann et al. 2016), which fed into orientalist tropes of the sexually lascivious oriental male (Bhattacharyya 2008). Public discourses shifted from accommodation to concerns of “uncontrolled” migration, replaying the Gothic narrative of “reverse colonisation” whereby the nation is “vulnerable to attack from more vigorous, ‘primitive’ peoples” (Arata 1990, 623). Within populist and increasingly broader political spectrums, the refugee began to be “re-figured as the potential ‘terrorist’ who surreptitiously infiltrates the space of Europe,” or as the “potential ‘criminal’ or ‘rapist’ who corrodes the social and moral fabric of ‘Europe’ from within” (New Keywords Collective 2016).

Following the 2015 and 2016 Paris terror attacks and backlash against refugees amid fears of Islamist terrorists exploiting refugee channels to enter Europe, as well as an upsurge in a populist nationalism and anti-Muslim rhetoric during the Brexit campaign and recent UK terror attacks, the figure of the Muslim exposes the persistence of racial thinking to imaginaries of Europe. Within this volatile context, this paper examines the limits of hospitality towards the Muslim Other and implications for refugee resettlement from conflicts in Syria and the region in the UK. I argue that state policy on refugee resettlement and counter-terrorism within the context of the Syrian war have increasingly become interpenetrated, meaning the “Muslim question” cannot be divorced from security concerns associated with terrorism
and national identity. Important here is how discourses of “safety” are (re)formulated and point to complex (re)negotiations of belonging that challenge us to (re)consider not only what it means to be human, but what it means to be humane in a post-Brexit nation.

**Conflating “the refugee” and “terrorist” categories: Muslims as conditional citizens**

Since 9-11, trajectories of the “war on asylum” and “war on terrorism” have converged (Sivanandan 2006, 2) by collapsing categories of “asylum seeker” and “terrorist” (Weber and Bowling 2004, 198). Increasingly stringent immigration and anti-terrorism legislation comprise exclusionary practices of nation construction that Gothicise Muslims as a “different order of humanity” (Razack 2008, 7). For example, the UK Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001 abolished habeas corpus and introduced detention without trial for foreign nationals.1 Every (Muslim) immigrant or asylum seeker could be stopped and searched, legitimated on the basis of suspected links to international terrorism (Sivanandan 2006, 5), which derogated the European Convention on Human Rights (Collyer 2005). Terror tactics visited upon Muslims include deportation and deprivation of citizenship rights through introducing the 2006 Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act alongside the “list of unacceptable behaviours” in the 2006 Terrorism Act. Right to remain for foreign nationals could be revoked, enabling the UK Government to “formalize the distinction between “moderate” and “extremist” Muslims in Britain” (McGhee 2008, 45).

Restrictions to citizenship rights have been extended to British Muslims through the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 which empowers police “to seize and retain passports” (c.6 Part1. Chapter 1) and tickets from those suspected of terrorist involvement and impose a Temporary Exclusion Order to “disrupt and control the return to the UK of British citizens who have engaged in terrorism-related activity abroad.” Measures include cancelling travel documents and placing individuals on a “no fly” list, as well as enforcing restrictions on their return. Such measures are emboldened by a Gothic narrative of the Muslim Other terrorizing the civilized world expressed through the “specter of returning fighters” of IS (Joppke 2016, 728–729). The Gothic occupies the site of discursive struggle for societies to claim possession of the civilized by abjecting what is considered Other to the civilized self (Punter and Byron 2003, 5), which is evident in the arena of civil rights surrounding counter-terrorism measures. The Home Office (2018, 4, my italics) states that restrictions are “necessary in a democratic society” for national security, illustrating that Britain’s claims to democratic (i.e. civilized) virtues are used to legitimise securitizing Muslims’ bodies. Increased powers to deprive citizenship of those suspected of terrorist involvement and removing
procedural safeguards creates a “hierarchy among British citizens” (Choudhury 2017, 225), specifically Muslims (Farques 2017, 984–985). As Choudhury explains:

Muslims are at best “Tolerated Citizens”, required to demonstrate their commitment to British values. Muslims holding unacceptable extremist views are “Failed Citizens” while the “home-grown” radicalised terrorist suspect is conceived of as the barbaric Other to British values, whose failure as a citizen is severe enough to justify the deprivation of citizenship.

Invocations of Muslims as Britain’s “barbaric Other” or what Puar and Rai (2002) term, “terrorist-monsters,” enables Gothic spaces of law where violence is simultaneously concealed within, yet performed by, modern law (Valier 2002, 333). These measures are evident of a “conditional order of hospitality” (Honig 2006, 112) for Muslims fundamental to Britain’s contemporary “racial formation” (Kapoor 2013, 1029, 2018; also Kapoor and Narkowicz 2017) that privileges normative citizens’ security above equality.

Muslims’ transnational identification exceeds national borders (Khan 2006, 182–187), meaning the liberal state must contend not only with the domestic arena, but the “broader geopolitical structure of liberal hegemony” (Adamson, Triadafilopoulou, and Zolberg 2011, 848) arising from Britain’s global position in the “war on terror,” with implications for both countering terrorism and, as the next section examines, refugee resettlement.

Securitizing the refugee regime

This section explores how practices of racial biopolitics present in responses to resettling Syrian refugees operate through five features of the Concentrationary Gothic framework: (1) nation construction; (2) spatial control; (3) racial profiling and surveillance/screening practices; (4) restrictions to political engagement and freedom of speech; (5) production of internal divisions within the oppressed group.

The Syrian refugee “crisis” offers a significant terrain for addressing how “race” is deployed in nation construction to order and exclude populations. The Syrian Muslim represents Europe’s constitutive outside, whose admittance would threaten the fundamental meaning of Europeanness. Exclusionary resettlement practices, notably Slovakia’s outright refusal to accept Syrian Muslims on the basis that, as a Christian country it would be unable to accommodate them, highlights how Europeanness functions as a “defining logic of race” (Hesse 2007, 646) based on whiteness, Christianity, and modernity. Although ostensibly designed to resettle refugees arising from the war in Syria and the region, the UK government’s VPRS reaffirms Muslims as Gothic others associated with illiberal and barbaric behaviours by centralizing minority identities (religious, gendered, disabled, sexuality) as priorities for humanitarian assistance, and therefore “as‘ victims of the archetypal
Muslim other” (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016; also Akram 2000) in need of modernization, democratization, and secularization. Kirtsoglou and Tsimouris (2016, 8) corroborate that portraying the Orient as “a space that breeds war, violence, persecution and poverty,” produces Europe antithetically as developed and superior, importantly, “concealing its own responsibilities and geostrategic role in the staging of wars and violence.” This representation justifies international intervention and exclusion/containment through reposing a central concern of the Gothic of “claiming possession of the civilized” by treating the Other as uncivilized (Punter and Byron 2003, 5).

I move on to discuss racialized practices of spatial control that designate spaces of un/safety. The UK government’s decision to prioritise allocating humanitarian aid to Syria and the region rather than resettling Syrians in the UK highlights how constructions of safety are used politically to determine where right to reside can be granted. Humanitarian aid is presented as a means of protecting Syrians from making the “dangerous” (House of Commons 2017, 4) journey to Europe. An alternative reading is that it operates as a containment policy within the (European) “crisis” framework (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016, 458), prolonging Syrians’ risk by prioritizing UK citizens’ security amid fears that Islamist terrorists will exploit refugee routes to perpetrate attacks within Europe. IS claimed responsibility for the November 2015 Paris attacks that killed 130 people and injured 368 as retaliation for French air-strikes on IS targets in Syria and Iraq. Planned in Syria and organized by a Belgium-based terrorist cell, the assailants were mostly French or Belgian citizens, two were Iraqi nationals, all had fought in Syria, and some had entered Europe amongst migrants and refugees seeking refuge.

Racialized conceptions of “could be terrorists” rely on established stereotypes which are reworked to fit contemporary treatment of refugees from Syria and the region. As Goldberg (2006, 345, original italics) observes, “The Muslim in Europe – not individual Muslims, not even Muslim communities, but the idea of the Muslim himself – has come to represent the threat of violent death.” Not only does granting humanitarian aid enable the UK government to perform the role of benevolent benefactor, but it keeps Syrian refugees away from Britain. Examples include the European Commission proposing a European Border and Coast Guard on the 15 December 2015 to fortify Europe’s external borders and Schengen area.

Practices of racial profiling and surveillance/screening reflect the Gothic’s preoccupation with classifying “monstrous” bodies deemed threatening to the social order. The shift from human rights to security for determining refugee status contests the universalism to which claims to the category of the human worthy of protection can be forged. Significant infringements to human rights characterizing counter-terrorism measures during the “war on terror” (McGhee 2008, 111) are present in practices of securitization used in the VPRS, which encompass biometric and profile building to determine
those suitable for resettlement in the UK. Cases are submitted by the UNHCR to be screened by the Home Office. Evidence given to the International Development Committee details the two-stage screening process for refugees considered for resettlement (House of Commons 2017, 19). Firstly, biometric details and bio-data are taken. Whilst Gilroy (2000, 108) argues that such technological innovations means that the individual “is even less constrained by the immediate forms of physical presence established by the body,” I follow Pugliese’s (2008, 49) critique of such post-racial accounts who argues that within the “war on terror,” biometric technologies secure “identity dominance” by pre-emptively identifying, targeting and capturing suspects. Biometrics provide a similar function within the VPRS by pre-emptively excluding individuals from resettlement. Physical bodies, as Puar (2007, 151–159) contends in her discussion of counter-terrorism practices, are transformed into “data bodies,” further illustrating how counter-terrorism measures and the refugee regime interpenetrate.

Subject to the white (non-Muslim) gaze, the potential refugee must meet the criteria for resettlement determined by their observer involving restrictions to freedom of speech and political engagement. As Arendt (1979, 299) argues, human rights is founded on a central dilemma since it presumes the existence of a universally determined “human being as such.” However, for the refugee to be recognized as a refugee their subjecthood must be stripped back, meaning they are divested of agency, both political and social. For Syrian refugees, their political proclivities are used as screening criteria to secure the British subject from threat. The second stage involves building a profile about the potential refugee to be resettled; a practice comparable to the use of profiles in pre-emptive counter-terrorism policing. This involves: “go[ing]’ out into communities in the region to understand who this person in front of them and applying is. They will, at that point, screen people out on the basis of criminality, combatants and war crime” (International Development Committee 2015). Collyer (2005, 283) explains that whilst “refugee” is a “morally unassailable category,” “terrorist” “shifts the balance,” legitimizing “repressive measures.” Similar to differentiations operating within the UK “war on terror” context between “moderate” and “extremist,” the moderate Muslim, as Tyrer (2008, 59) writes, refers to a “qualified Muslimness; a muted alterity” that depoliticizes them.

Internal divisions within the oppressed group are engendered because members must compete for recognition of victimhood, further subjecting them to the position of vulnerable. Asymmetric positioning of vulnerability/protector implied by the scheme’s name (Syrian Vulnerable Person Relocation Scheme) and its stated priority of “helping the most vulnerable refugees who cannot be supported in the region” (House of Commons 2017, 9), reinforces conceptions of the refugee as a victim requiring saving. The potential refugee must perform a non-threatening “refugeeness” that corresponds to
received understandings of the refugee as victim requiring protection, that in turn, enables UK state actors to take up a dominant position; a neo-colonial configuration of white benevolence or contemporary manifestation of the “white saviour.” The figure of the refugee not only challenges conceptions of universal human rights therefore, but highlights “refugeeness” as a “site of contestation” (Suzu2016, 1) that supports neo-colonial practices of classification and exclusion.

I move on to discuss two contemporary examples that illustrate the human rights-security nexus framing responses to refugees from conflicts in Syria and the region.

“Breaking point”: invasion and the “Muslim threat”

The controversial Breaking Point poster used by former UKIP leader, Nigel Farage, as part of the Leave campaign during the 2016 EU referendum in Britain played on fears of being invaded by asylum seekers that can be understood as a contemporary re-working of the “reverse colonisation” Gothic narrative linked to perceived decline of national and racial identity (Brantlinger 1988; Arata1990). I discuss the poster because it presents a stark example of how race hate has been mobilized for political ends within the Brexit context and secondly, illustrates continuities in racial terror experienced by Jewish populations during World War II and colonial logics of subjection and exclusion that fit with the Concentrationary Gothic framework I am advancing.

The poster depicted lines of people largely from conflicts in Syria seeking refuge in Europe. Reported by David Prentis of the Unison Union to the Metropolitan Police for inciting racial hatred (Guardian, 16 June, 2016), the poster highlights how racialized logics were being used to cast Middle Eastern asylum seekers and the Muslim Other in particular, as a threat to Europe through recourse to familiar Gothic tropes of invasion that have historically been used to stir hatred against racialized populations deemed undesirable for inclusion within the national community (Tesfahuney1998).

Of particular significance is how, rendered an anonymous mass of bodies, the poster visually depicts the racial epidermal schema of which Fanon (1986, 112) speaks, where the racialized Other is denied subjecthood. Rajaram (2002, 251) provides a fitting description of how refugees are “consigned to the body. That is, they are rendered speechless and without agency, a physical entity, or rather a physical mass within which individuality is subsumed. Corporeal, refugees are speechless and consigned to ‘visuality’ ….” In contrast, Farage’s uniqueness is foregrounded. As a normative white male, he can occupy the role of speaking subject who re-casts the individual experiences of those featured as an opportunity for reproducing exclusionary racial technologies well-placed to determine which bodies are suitable for inclusion within the (normative white) national imaginary. As Goldberg (2009, 1273)
reminds us, racism is not reducible to “narrow connections to colonial subjection and repression, ordering and governmentality.” Rather, colonial outlooks continue to inform conditions of possibility for exploiting, governing and admitting or excluding those categorized as racially different and by contrast, elevating those understood as racially belonging to the dominant and privileged.

There are two key aspects concerning the human rights-security nexus which I want to elaborate. Firstly, how the Concentrationary Gothic framework sensitisizes us to how current racial configurations operating within the refugee regime and their interrelation with Gothic tropes draw from earlier terror formations. In support of a relational approach that “seeks to connect racial logics” (Meer 2013b, 501, original italics), the Gothic draws attention to how representational frameworks shift depending on which group is charged with harbouring uncivilized or barbarous tendencies that make them unsuitable for inclusion. Racial conceptions and racist practices, although local in terms of their resonances and meaning, nonetheless exhibit ties to wider circulations of meaning across time and place (Goldberg 2009, 1273). Debate has ensued concerning the relationship between anti-semitism and Islamophobia and “the place of … race in relation to religion” (Rana 2007, 150; also Meer 2013a). Current depictions of the Muslim Other invading Europe demonstrate historical continuities with anti-semitism and Gothicisation of the figure of the Jew. The trope of invasion and its semantic association with the parasite present in anti-semitism in nineteenth century England was reflected in Gothic narratives of the time and the figure of the nationless Wandering Jew (Shapiro 1997; Davison 2004) emblematic of the Jewish question. Halberstam notes (1995, 14) that the Jew was “marked as a threat to capital, to masculinity, and to nationhood.” The poster illustrates how the concentrationary seeps into, and shapes, contemporary racial configurations and intersects with Gothic discourses, whereby racialized groups are constructed as threats to the health of the nation. It was not long before comparisons were being made with a Nazi propaganda film (Guardian, 16 June, 2016) depicting unwanted Jewish refugees during World War Two seeking refuge with subtitles on the historic image describing them as “parasites undermining their host countries.” In the current context, the refugee figured as Muslim is articulated through a comparable discourse of white dispossession centred on a loss of national identity following the admittance of refugees into Britain.

Secondly, the poster invites us to consider, at the heart of racialized biopolitical regimes and terror formations on which they are premised, whose human rights should be protected, or, put another way, whose lives can be put at risk? Converging terrors of terrorism and loss of national identity occupying western societies post-9/11, and which have regained momentum following recent terror attacks within European cities, can be understood through the Gothic’s preoccupation with borders and their collapse. The
Gothic nature of contemporary social risks (forthcoming; also Valier 2002, Abbas 2013) arises from a fundamental concern with security both “national security and personal ontological security” (McGhee 2005, 76). What has surfaced in the post-9/11 context is a Gothic populism that draws into relation a pronounced “asylophobia” (McGhee 2005, 76) with the threat of terrorism (Weber and Bowling 2004, 198). Depicting “Middle Eastern looking” refugees en masse as security threats divorces them from their particular histories of flight, including how these displacements are in part a result of UK foreign policy and places the rights of UK citizens above those of asylum seekers. Although the Syrian War predates the so-called refugee “crisis” and Brexit, it only becomes framed as a “crisis” when the borders separating Europe from its Muslim Others are disrupted (see James, this issue). The presence of refugees arising from conflicts in Syria and the region thus re-centres the question of whose life counts as a human life?

**White dispossession and the threat of the Syrian “man-child”**

The second example explores how admittance of child refugees from countries including Syria and Afghanistan following the dissolution of the Calais “Jungle” is framed as a potential security risk that requires that the refugee subject their body for scrutiny, again illustrating a racialized biopolitics premised on classifying bodies to be protected/excluded. Conceived within the Concentrationary Gothic framework, I argue that these biopolitical practices draw their legitimacy from the Gothic figure of the “man-child;” that is of the (male) asylum seeker posing as a child to gain entry to the UK. This figure articulates fears of the Muslim posing a security risk to the normative white populace by illegally entering Britain’s borders through false or mistaken identity (a key Gothic trope) and exploiting Britain’s hospitality. It provides a useful entryway for examining how categories of the “human” are being fought within the contemporary context of the “Muslim question” and how practices of racialization and Gothicisation intersect (Abbas 2013, forthcoming; also Malchow 1996, 4). This figure can be understood as a recent manifestation of longstanding racialized tropes of the deceitful Arab that reanimates the Gothic discourse of degeneration by embodying the threat of the nation collapsing into barbarity and chaos (Hurley 1996, 10; Byron 2000, 132–133), as the Cologne attacks described earlier have etched into the popular imaginary. The Gothic maps an alternative trajectory to the certainties of science for determining the presence of criminality and thus securing the subject; here figured by the “man-child” whose potential indetermination poses alarm. This figure embodies an important departure between the Gothic and Enlightenment science described by Wagner (2012, 75) whereby “In contrast to scientific faith in the transparent body,” the body is represented in the Gothic as “an untrustworthy source of information about the self.”
To illustrate this figure, I refer to an article in the *Express* (19 October 2016) which reports on the media row on admittance of child refugees following a caller’s “furious tirade at the liberal elite” for opting to censor pictures of child migrants arriving in the UK. The article has been chosen because although I am not making claims to its representativeness, it provides a useful illustration of how the Brexit context has shaped attitudes to refugee resettlement. Further, it highlights important intersections of “race” and class whereby the white nationalist takes up the position of a dispossessed white subject threatened not only by the presence of (“Muslim looking”) refugees, but subscribers to a liberal discourse by white elites that contravenes the rights of white working class Britons.

In an interesting move in which the *BBC* liberal elite are constituted as the parasitic object feeding off the white working poor, a caller, known only as Tony from Liverpool, berates the *BBC* for censoring the faces of child refugees arriving in the UK from the Calais Jungle, preventing viewers from deciding for themselves if they are actually children deserving Britain’s hospitality. Positioning himself as a taxpayer, and thus legitimate citizen and contributor to the nation, Tony is affronted by the duping he believes white working class Britons have been subjected to by what he terms, “liberal elites,” depicted as out of touch with the realities of a disenfranchized white populace. Tony indicates that the EU referendum provided an opportunity to regain power for ordinary Britons by forcing elites to address the concerns of those usually disregarded – the white working class: “If they [politicians] learned anything from the referendum over the EU it is that if you want to try and fool the people, you go ahead and do that but it will cost you at the ballot box,” he rants.

Admittance of Syrian refugee children is presented as another instance in which white working class Britons are being exploited into giving up resources of which they already have little share. Debates concerning differentiating the (illegitimate) economic migrant from the “rightful refugee” to be protected, effectively pits the refugee against the white working class citizen as a threat to their economic security, which not only fuels antagonisms towards refugees, but exposes the limits of hospitality towards refugee resettlement. As Sales (2002) notes, increasingly stringent asylum policy has created “a new social category of asylum seeker … portrayed as ‘undeserving’ in contrast to the ‘deserving’ refugee.” Politicization of asylum issues concerning welfare provision and increased controls on legal entry to “Fortress Europe” has strengthened asylum seekers’ association with a burden on welfare and as “illegals.” Criminalization of the asylum seeker has particular significance for Middle Eastern claimants through their association with terrorism.

The shift from human rights to security enables the normative white subject to take up the position of being “at risk” from a “threatening Other,”
limiting refugees’ humanity from being protected or even recognized. Invoking the dangerousness of the refugee, Tory MP David Davies is quoted in the article as saying “The UK has set a very dangerous precedent,” whereby people can claim they are under 18 and have relatives in the UK and be accepted. Differentiating the legitimate refugee from the “undeserving” involves reducing the refugee to the body, and even further, to their constituent body parts. This is most starkly displayed in the 2016 furore concerning using dental X-rays to determine the ages of children seeking refuge which brought the issue of human rights to the fore. The British Dental Association was adamant in its condemnation on ethical grounds to such measures being enforced. Framing refugees as security threats requiring “verification” exposes the shift in focus from granting human rights to assessing security risk. Yet as the previous example showed, this re-focusing is a re-assertion of racial dominance rather than new territory.

Necessity for the racialized Other to be “known,” underpinning Tony’s demand to see the refugees’ faces, shows how refusal to represent the Other disrupts racial dynamics of looking where, following Fanon (1986, 110), the racialized Other is forced to “meet the white man’s eyes.” Spurr (1993, 14) describes how “looking and speaking enter into the economy of an essentially colonial situation, in which one race holds, however provisionally and uneasily, authority over another.” Inability to see the Other thus undermines the authority of the white nationalist, inciting an angered desire to regain power and control considered rightfully theirs.

Performances of exclusion undertaken by Brexiters highlight contestations not only between white nationalists and minority communities, but between white working class populations and white elites. Such conflicts illustrate not only the importance of class to articulations of racism, but the salience of whiteness for understanding how relations of racism are (re)configured and operate at a number of levels of antagonism within the Brexit context. The indeterminate figure of the man-child comprises what Halberstam (2000, 21, 22) terms a “Gothic technology” by condensing multiple fears relating to nationality, race, class, and gender in one body, and by contrast, produces the normative human as white, male, and middle-class. Since the body is a key instrument of discipline (Wagner 2012), dissolution of the boundaries of the body and self pose a threat to the social order.

In her excellent discussion of fin-de-siècle Gothic, Hurley (1996, 3) notes its obsession with “the ruination of the human subject,” where in place of a stable, bounded human subject, is instead the “spectacle of body metamorphic and undifferentiated.” Difficulties in ascertaining the “real refugee” who in this example, fools others by pretending to be a vulnerable child, legitimates dehumanizing screening practices to be undertaken for us to recognize them as humans worthy of our protection. As such, questions of the human are inextricably linked to that of the humane. The act of accepting
refugees – a humane act – is nonetheless conditioned by inhumane activities that are legitimized in order to protect humanity, but which point to the ever-present possibility of the ruination of the human subject.

Conclusion

This article has explored the seismic shift from viewing asylum through the lens of human rights to security. Conflation of trajectories of asylum and counter-terrorism within the context of the Syrian conflict has particular implications for securing sanctuary within the UK for Muslim refugees arising from these conflicts. I advanced the Concentrationary Gothic as a framework for understanding how racialized practices of nation construction, spatial control, racial profiling and surveillance/screening practices, restrictions to freedom of speech and political engagement, and internal divisions produced within the oppressed group, are legitimated by Gothic discourses that present Muslims as uncivilized and barbarous beings who pose a threat to national security and identity.

The VPRS illustrates continuities in logics of racial terror visited upon the Muslim refugee through racialized biopolitical technologies. Racialized screening strategies involving profile building and biometrics and biodata to assess whether individuals are “risky” are comparable to preventative counter-terrorism measures that produce both as suspect populations, and further, perpetuate a racialized hierarchy of humans where safety is not secured, but must be recognized and earned. This requires that Syrian refugees subject their body for scrutiny and submit personal narratives that are palatable to the demands of western democratic states by performing a depoliticized and non-threatening self, thus perpetuating neo-colonial configurations of vulnerable/protector.

The Concentrationary Gothic is attentive to relational logics of race/racism (Goldberg 2009) that traverse time and space. I analysed two recent examples of the treatment of Middle Eastern refugees to illustrate how existing racialized tropes have been re-worked to suit current socio-political conditions. Representations of refugees as parasitic invaders feeding off the populace as depicted in the Breaking Point poster and its historic evil twin, the Nazi propaganda video, illustrate the importance of drawing together concentrationary and Gothic frameworks to conceptualize how racial terror draws its impulses from previous articulations of threat, invasion, insecurity, and monstrosity to justify contemporary conditions of domination and curtailment of human rights present in exclusionary border tactics and racial profiling within the Syrian refugee “crisis.” I advanced the figure of the “man-child” as a recent manifestation of the deceitful Arab that draws together Gothic and racialized discourses to produce Middle Eastern asylum seekers as a threat to the UK populace. These depictions legitimise dehumanizing screening practices to
determine the ages of asylum seekers in order to protect the security of the (white) nation. Exemplified by the Concentrationary Gothic framework, the figure of the refugee highlights that the category of “human” is not secured; recognition as human is required for safety and security to be granted and further, that this category is imbricated within racialized power structures meaning hospitality is always foreshadowed by the possibility of hostility to the Other.

Notes

1. Indefinite detention of foreign nationals without trial was ruled discriminatory by the Law Lords in 2004. Then Home Secretary, Charles Clarke, subsequently introduced the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005 which replaced detention without trial with control orders (electronic tagging and house arrests).
2. The Home Office ruled out dental checks used to verify the ages of refugees arriving from Calais in October 2016 as “inaccurate, inappropriate and unethical.” However, the Home Office stated that “physical appearance and demeanour are used as part of the interview process” by UK and French officials to “assess age.” On arrival to Britain, refugee children are fingerprinted as “part of further identity checks” (Guardian, 19 October 2016).

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