BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

'Colonising the Future': Migrant Crossings on the English Channel and the Discourse of Risk

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Emma Jacobs

no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land
—Warsan Shire, 'Home'[2]

In November 2018, a small number of Middle Eastern migrants began crossing the English Channel to Dover in dinghies and fishing boats – a previously rare mode of crossing. Despite the relatively low numbers, state and media responses to these events were widespread and often alarmist from the start, with the discourse of 'risk' becoming particularly prevalent. This paper explores the representational politics of the early coverage of these events, focusing primarily on online media from BBC News and press statements from the UK Home Office. Through a close reading of these texts, this paper argues that the language of risk serves to inscribe (ir)responsibility onto the bodies of migrants, presenting them as threats in need of management who are putting themselves and others at risk through their recklessness. Obscured from the discourse is the deeper causality of this risk – the fact that the same state entities that portray the migrants as excessive risk-takers are in many ways responsible for the conditions of 'deterrence' that make the risky option the only way. This moralisation and monopolisation of risk is ultimately part of a larger ideological discourse that serves to colonise possible futures. By placing the discourse of risk in a historical and political context, this paper seeks to draw out the nuanced ways in which ascriptions of risk and practices of risk-management contribute to the perpetuation of a (neo)colonial and capitalist world order, whose violent effects are enacted in this instance upon subaltern migrants.

Introduction: Oceanic Borderlands

The ocean has often been depicted in literature, art, politics, and legal thought as a vast no man's land, a non-territorial zone beyond the control of any nation-state.[3] In practice, however, the ocean is a site dense with conflict, hierarchies, claims to ownership, and the visible and invisible exertion of power.[4] This is particularly true of those waters that act as borders between nations, sites in which nature becomes mobilised as a barrier to migrant entry.[5] For an island nation such as the UK, the ocean is one of the prime symbolic and geographical signifiers of inside/outside, and is often imbued with the cultural discourse of risk and threat. Suvendrini Perera writes of Australia that '[i]nsularity, the insistence on being an island girt by sea, is the logic that underwrites Australian assertions of nationhood. The ocean, the beach

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[2] Warsan Shire, 'Home', *Poem Hunter* <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/home-433/> [accessed 17 December 2019].

[3] Hugo Grotius, *Freedom of the Seas, or, The Right which Belongs to the Dutch to Take Part in the East Indian Trade,* trans. by Ralph Van Deman Magoffin (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1916); Itamar Mann, *Humanity at Sea: Maritime Migration and the Foundations of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[4] Peter Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital,* trans. by Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014); Philip E. Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[5] Patricia Nguyen, '*salt | water*: Vietnamese Refugee Passages, Memory, and Statelessness at Sea', *Women's Studies Quarterly,* 45.1/2 (2017), 95–111 <https://doi.org/10.1353/wsq.2017.0030>; Suvendrini Perera, 'Oceanic Corpo-graphies, Refugee Bodies and the Making and Unmaking of Waters', *Feminist Review,* 103.1 (2013), 58–79 <https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.2012.26>.

and the coastline are the sites where this insularity is most clearly exposed as well as most violently defended.'[6] The same might be said of the UK, a nation-state that appears deeply invested in its insularity from the rest of Europe and from those constructed as risky Others, as evidenced by state and public responses to the so-called 'European refugee crisis' and the 2016 EU referendum.[7] Within this context, the image of the migrant[8] boat – containing 'outsider' figures literally suspended in oceanic borderlands – is a profoundly charged symbol.

In recent history, migrant crossings of the English Channel by boat have been relatively rare. Numbers of migrants seeking to cross irregularly from Calais to Dover have indeed increased over the last decade, coinciding with global escalation in forced displacement and a corresponding crackdown on legally sanctioned forms of migration by many Western states.[9] However, undocumented migrants on the European continent have been far more likely to attempt to enter the UK by stowing away on vehicles passing through the Channel Tunnel, rather than travelling by sea.[10] Therefore, unlike the Mediterranean Sea – whose waters are believed to be the deadliest border zone in the world[11] – the English Channel itself has not been a high-profile site of immigration. But since the winter of 2018, and for reasons to be discussed below, a number of migrant boats have made the crossing from Calais to Dover. The numbers remain low: according to the BBC, between November 2018 and October 2019 roughly 270 boats carrying a total of around 1,700 people were discovered by the British authorities. This compares to over 20,000 people discovered hidden in ground transportation between the two countries within the same period; and over 100,000 attempted crossings of the Mediterranean Sea during that time.[12] Yet despite the relatively low numbers, the coverage of these events in the British media has been widespread and the government has quickly heightened security measures in response.[13] The coverage was particularly disproportionate during the first months of the events in late 2018, when the crossing of a mere 220

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[6] Perera, p. 66.

[7] See Gurminder K. Bhambra, 'Brexit, the Commonwealth, and Exclusionary Citizenship', *OpenDemocracy,* 8 December 2016 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/brexit-commonwealth-and-exclusionary-citizenship/> [accessed 4 April 2019]; Nadine El-Enany, 'Brexit as Nostalgia for Empire', *Critical Legal Thinking*, 19 June 2016 <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2016/06/19/brexit-nostalgia-empire/> [accessed 4 April 2019]; James Meek, *Dreams of Leaving and Remaining* (London: Verso, 2019).

[8] I use the term 'migrants' throughout, rather than 'refugees' or 'asylum seekers', to avoid legally inflected language that makes often-arbitrary yet materially consequential distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate migrations.

[9] Given the nature of irregular migration, detailed statistics on Calais–Dover crossings are unavailable. However, for estimates and trends see International Organization for Migration, *Migration Data Portal,* last updated 18 September 2019 < https://migrationdataportal.org/?i=stock_abs_&t=2019> [accessed 17 December 2019]; and Reece Jones, *Violent Borders: Refugees and the Right to Move* (London: Verso, 2017).

[10] BBC, 'Border Police Foil 56,000 Migration Attempts to Kent', *BBC News*, 24 August 2017 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-41029999> [accessed 19 December 2018].

[11] As will be echoed later in this case study, this fact is less due to inherent natural dangers of the Mediterranean Sea than due to the particular security assemblage operating in the area, both in terms of its active violence and its methods of deterrence and evasion of responsibility. For statistics of migrant deaths in the Mediterranean, see International Organization for Migration, 'Spotlight on the Mediterranean', *Missing Migrants Project,* last updated 17 December 2019, <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/> [accessed 17 December 2019]. For discussion of systemic border violence in the region, see Jones, pp. 12–28; and Timothy Raeymaekers, 'Introduction: Europe's Bleeding Border and the Mediterranean as a Relational Space', *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies,* 13 (2014), 163–172.

[12] For BBC-reported numbers, see BBC, 'Channel Migrants: Six Iranians Detained on Kent Beach', *BBC News*, 30 December 2018 <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-kent-46715101> [accessed 17 December 2019]; and Colin Campbell, 'Channel Migrants: Five Boats Head to England Each Week', *BBC News*, 4 November 2019 <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-kent-50255360> [accessed 17 December 2019]. For Mediterranean crossings, see International Organization for Migration, 'Spotlight on the Mediterranean'.

[13] Home Office, 'Joint UK-France Centre Opens in Calais to Tackle Criminality at Border', *Home Office*, 27 November 2018 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-uk-france-centre-opens-in-calais-to-tackle-criminality-at-border> [accessed 17 December 2018]; Home Office, 'UK-France Joint Action Plan on Illegal Migration across the Channel', *Home Office* , last updated 15 October 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-france-joint-action-plan-on-illegal-migration-across-the-channel> [accessed 17 December 2019].

migrants in eight weeks was already being described by MPs and media outlets as a 'crisis' or 'major incident', setting the tone for the public conversation that has followed.[14]

Focusing on this key time period, this paper explores the representational politics in early state and media portrayals of these events, focusing primarily on coverage from BBC News and press statements from the UK Home Office. These two sources were selected as representative faces of dominant state and media discourse, offering a prominent set of texts surveyable within the scope of this brief study. The BBC was chosen as it is the largest news organisation in the UK, and is nominally politically neutral yet state-funded, thus to some extent representing/guiding hegemonic ideas. In particular, I focus on BBC News's online articles and videos about the Channel crossings, widely accessible on their website and easily referenced.[15] The Home Office, meanwhile, is a fitting source for examination of state discourse on this topic, because it is the government department responsible for communicating with the British public about immigration issues. The press statements that I discuss come from the Home Office's online blog 'Home Office in the Media', updated each weekday and openly available online. The case study conducted here is built on close reading and discourse analysis of all materials pertaining to the migrant crossings published by these two sources, dating from November to December 2018.

While there are many different narratives at work in these representations, I focus here on a single, particularly recurrent theme: the discourse of *risk*. As I will expand upon below, I understand the concept of risk as a discursive and administrative tool used to quantify and articulate probabilities of events occurring that are considered undesirable by those doing the measuring.[16] The core of my argument is that in media and state representations of the crossings, the language of risk is mobilised as a way of inscribing blame and irresponsibility onto the bodies of migrants, and of portraying their journeys as inherently dangerous and doomed. Under this rubric, the migrants are presented as threats in need of management, who are putting themselves and others at risk through their recklessness. Erased from the discourse is the deeper causality of this risk – the fact that the same state entities that demonise the migrants as unnecessary risk-takers are largely responsible for the conditions of 'deterrence' that make the risky option the only way. This moralisation and monopolisation of risk, I argue, is ultimately part of a larger ideological discourse that serves to colonise possible futures.

Dangerous Game

On 10 December 2018, the BBC published a short online video entitled 'Dangerous "Game": Risking It All for a New Life'.[17] The video is presented as an attempt to contextualise the recent 'spike' in the number of migrants trying to cross the Channel. Set to the backdrop of ominous music, it opens with shaky footage of a man lying down in a vehicle. He is speaking to the camera, but his voice is drowned out by the music. Instead, superimposed over his face, the following words appear at the bottom of the screen:

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[14] BBC, 'Channel Migrants: Minister Defends Handling of "Crisis"', *BBC News*, 29 December 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-46706381> [accessed 17 December 2019].

[15] As of December 2019, the BBC News website is open access, requiring no reader subscription or login. According to recent research by Ofcom, BBC News has the highest share of online news readers in the UK; its reader demographics are fairly representative of the UK population, with a slight skew toward male and higher-income readers. Jigsaw Research, 'News Consumption in the UK: 2019', *Ofcom*, 24 July 2019, <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0027/157914/uk-news-consumption-2019-report.pdf> [accessed 17 December 2019].

[16] Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, trans. by Mark Ritter (London: Sage Publications, 1992).

[17] BBC, 'Dangerous "Game": Risking It All for a New Life', reported by Rana Rahimpour, produced by Mohamed Madi and Stefan Veselinovic, online video, *BBC News*, 10 December 2018 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-middle-east-46503755/iran-s-migrants-trying-to-get-from-serbia-to-the-uk> [accessed 18 December 2018].

Clinging to a lorry, Pedram is trying to cross illegally into the European Union. Iranian migrants call it "playing the game". But six weeks later, Pedram was dead. After repeated attempts, he froze to death in a forest in Serbia.

At this point, the image cuts to a brief shot of police officers, and then to a small dinghy in the ocean. The dinghy is emphasised by an edited 'spotlight' effect, while a larger boat surges toward it. The subtitles continue: 'He was one of thousands of Iranians trying to get into the EU. Last month dozens of Iranians were stopped in the English Channel.'

Already, the first thirty seconds of this video gesture toward the central role of risk in the BBC's framing of this story. Pedram is portrayed here as an irresponsible risk-taker: at worst a criminal, at best a reckless gambler in a deadly 'game' of chance. Amplified by the sinister music, his actions are described as 'illegal', while the presence of police and the spotlighting of the migrant boat connote surveillance. Pedram's apparently light-hearted smile and the language of 'playing the game' are bluntly juxtaposed with the revelation of his death, implying a lack of appropriate seriousness; an attitude out-of-step with the gravity of the situation. The implicit line of causality is that Pedram's death was a logical product of his reckless behaviour. As the reporter notes of another migrant later in the video: 'It's a huge risk, and he says he's going to take that risk again and again until he makes it to the European Union'. The video tells us that migrants will continue to 'try to cross into the UK illegally, despite the risks', without any further expansion on the sociopolitical situations that motivate such actions. On this front, Pedram remains silent – we do not know what is contained in his untranslated, inaudible words.

This representation of migrants as pursuers of risk recurs throughout the many articles that the BBC has published to date on the Channel crossings, and is particularly prominent in the initial two months' coverage. Between 3 November and 30 December 2018, the BBC reported on twenty-nine boats found near Dover carrying an estimated 220 migrants, all 'claim[ing] to be Iranian'.[18] Loaded language repeatedly criminalises their actions and inscribes suspicion onto their personhood. They are often described, for example, as 'suspected migrants' – a transposition of the term 'suspected criminal' that feeds into the production of inherent migrant illegality.[19] Building on this clear criminalisation, there are more subtle implications of irresponsibility: 'Illegal immigrants may be *exploiting* staff shortages'; 'The craft [...] entered the Port of Dover *without notifying authorities*'; 'a visa-free travel scheme that many are believed to have *taken advantage* of'; 'Iranians are *choosing to risk* their lives'.[20] One article quotes from Dover MP Charlie Elphicke, who goes a step further in explicitly condemning the migrants for this risk-taking: 'Not only do they put themselves at risk, they put other people in the Dover Strait [...] at risk'.[21] This language is echoed in the Home Office statement from 15 November, which says, 'Nobody

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[18] BBC, 'Channel Migrants: Six Iranians Detained'; BBC, 'Migrant Boat Located in English Channel off Kent Coast', *BBC News*, 12 December 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-46536332> [accessed 19 December 2018].

[19] Fiona B. Adamson, 'Crossing Borders: International Migration and National Security', *International Security,* 31.1 (2006), 165–199 <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2006.31.1.165>; Dider Fassin, 'Policing Borders, Producing Boundaries: The Governmentality of Immigration in Dark Times', *Annual Review of Anthropology,* 40 (2011), 213–226 <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-081309-145847>; Nathalie Peutz and Nicholas de Genova, 'Introduction', in *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement*, ed. by Nathalie Peutz and Nicholas de Genova (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 1–29.

[20] BBC, 'Port Security "Resourced to Fail", Inspectors Told', *BBC News,* 12 November 2018 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-46187660> [accessed 17 December 2018]; BBC, 'Suspected Migrants on "Stolen" Fishing Boat in Dover', *BBC News,* 13 November 2018 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-46193799> [accessed 17 December 2018]; BBC, 'Dangerous "Game"'; BBC, 'Why Are Iranians Crossing the Channel in Dinghies?', *BBC News*, 26 November 2018 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-46296249> [accessed 17 December 2018]. Italics added.

[21] BBC, 'Suspected Migrants'.

should put their life at risk attempting to smuggle themselves into the UK across the Channel'.[22] This moralising tone is a ubiquitous feature of the BBC and Home Office publications, tacitly portraying the migrants' risk-taking as acts of selfish or reckless criminality.

Risk as a Colonising Strategy

What is going on here in the application of risk discourse to these migrant journeys? There appears to be a chasm – all too familiar in discussions of global migration – between the expectation that migrants should respect ordinary bureaucratic procedures, and the desperate reality of the situations that compel many people to undertake such journeys. I would argue that this incongruence stems from the disparity between the lived *uncertainty* that these migrants often face, and the framework of *risk* that the state and media use to narrativize it. To understand this, it may help to examine what we mean by 'risk' in the first place. Although often thought of as synonymous with uncertainty or danger, it has a narrower and more technical meaning rooted in the mathematical concept of probability. As illuminated by Ulrich Beck, risk is a tool that seeks to calculate the likelihood of certain outcomes within a set range of possibilities.[23] Importantly, risk is not an event that exists externally in the world, nor is it a neutrally observable fact; rather, it is a framing device through which humans – and often institutions – attempt to manage uncertainty 'by gathering and storing knowledge and flexing [their] practical, technological arm'.[24] As such, it 'inherently contains the concept of control', for its aim is to tame the unknown by numericizing it within a human-made algorithm.[25] For Beck, 'As soon as we speak in terms of "risk", we are talking about calculating the incalculable, colonising the future'.[26]

The word 'colonising' is important here, and is more than metaphorical. The use of risk-management in colonial and neo-colonial history – as operational procedure, as 'Othering' strategy, and as justification mechanism – has been widespread.[27] As Louise Amoore and Marieke de Goede articulate, it is often marginalised and racialised members of society who bear the brunt of risk-management, as 'the mastery of border risks by governments and their business and technology partners is undertaken on the back of intensification and reallocation of risk onto the most vulnerable groups'.[28] The racialised Other becomes a risk that must be contained and bordered; while the groups to whom this risk is 'undeservedly' posed are often implicitly coded as white Western citizens. By displacing riskiness onto certain groups in this way – i.e., seeing them as a threat to society – the cycle of risk-taking is perpetuated as this marginalisation often forces them into still more 'risky' situations.[29] As such, the discourse of risk

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[22] Home Office, 'Home Office in the Media Blog: Thursday 15 November', *Home Office in the Media*, 15 November 2018a <https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2018/11/15/home-office-in-the-media-blog-thursday-15-november/> [accessed 17 December 2018].

[23] Beck, *Risk Society*; Ulrich Beck, 'The Terrorist Threat: World Risk Society Revisited', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 19.4 (2002), 39–55 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276402019004003>.

[24] Zygmunt Bauman, 'Times of Interregnum', *Ethics and Global Politics*, 5.1 (2012), 49–56 (quote on p. 50) <https://doi.org/10.3402/egp.v5i1.17200>.

[25] Beck, 'The Terrorist Threat', p. 40.

[26] *Ibid*.

[27] Louise Amoore and Marieke de Goede, 'Governance, Risk, and Dataveillance in the War on Terror', *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 43 (2005), 149–173 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-005-1717-8>; Kodwo Eshun, 'Further Considerations on Afrofuturism', *New Centennial Review*, 3.2 (2003), 287–302 <https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2003.0021>; Allan M. Williams and Vladimír Baláž, 'Migration, Risk, and Uncertainty: Theoretical Perspectives', *Population, Space and Place*, 18.2 (2012), 167–180 <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.663>.

[28] Amoore and de Goede, p. 163.

[29] Williams and Baláž.

both describes and produces risky lives; it forecloses possible futures by defining grim endings as the logical probable outcomes for certain 'risk groups'. I take Beck's phrase 'colonising the future' to refer to this delimiting of possible futures, applied systemically by sovereign powers to vulnerable populations, through both discourse and practice. For example, Afrofuturist theorist Kodwo Eshun argues that 'the envisioning, management, and delivery of reliable futures' is used to condemn Africa to a dystopian inevitability 'which predicts decades of immiserization'.[30] Such future-colonising, risk-management logic is also, of course, often applied to Middle Eastern diasporic subjects under the shadow of the so-called War on Terror.[31] This spills over to the policing of borders against the ultimate Other, the migrant. As Will Jennings notes – again using the pertinent language of colonial power – the concept of risk has 'coloniz[ed]' immigration policy in the UK, becoming one of the dominant narratives through which ever-harsher border security measures are justified.[32]

In the media and state rhetoric around the Channel crossings, we see this discourse being mobilised to portray Middle Eastern migrants as just such a 'risk group', both posing a threat to the nation and algorithmically doomed to a non-future. Thus, when migrants are criticised for not following due process – for 'exploiting' loopholes, entering 'without notifying authorities', using 'unseaworthy vessels', and 'choosing' reckless routes – the technicalising and colonising logic of risk-management is at work. Failure and death become the calculable likelihood, and the migrants are discursively condemned to fatality. Despite the fact that there have been no recorded deaths amongst these Channel crossers, many of the BBC articles contain risk-based predictions of approaching disaster. 'Sooner or later', a quote from one Border Force officer informs us, 'there [are] going to be bodies in boats. There aren't yet. It hasn't happened, or not that we know of, but it will eventually.'[33] This projected certainty that eventually, due to excessive risk-taking, 'someone will perish' confines such migrants to a single morbid future.[34]

The Cycle of Risk and Deterrence

Of course, this is not to say that the predictions of fatality are unfounded. The Channel crossing is in fact extremely dangerous: it is the busiest shipping lane in the world, small untracked boats are hard for larger ships to see, and the migrants are at the mercy of water and weather. For this and other reasons, attempting to cross is indeed – as the former head of the UK Border Force has said – 'very, very risky'.[35] Yet the causality implied in the state and media rhetoric, and what is left out of this causality, are crucial here in understanding how the moralisation of risk-taking is constructed and how risky lives are produced. By displacing (ir)responsibility onto migrants, smugglers, and the ocean itself, the dominant discourse effaces a larger system of oppression and 'deterrence'[36] that makes risk-taking the only option for many migrants seeking political and economic refuge in the UK.

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[30] Eshun, pp. 289, 292.

[31] Beck, 'The Terrorist Threat'; Sally Howell and Andrew Shryock, 'Cracking Down on Diaspora: Arab Detroit and America's "War on Terror"', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 76.3 (2003), 443–462 <https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2003.0040>; Arun Kundnani, *The Muslims Are Coming!: Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror* (London: Verso, 2014).

[32] Will Jennings, 'At No Serious Risk?: Border Control and Asylum Policy in Britain, 1994–2004', Discussion Paper 39, Centre for Analysis of Risk and Regulation, London School of Economics (2007) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228907022_At_No_Serious_Risk_Border_Control_and_Asylum_Policy_in_Britain_1994-2004>, p. 2.

[33] BBC, 'Migrant Boats: Smugglers Targeted from Intelligence Centre in Calais', *BBC News*, 28 November 2018 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-46375361> [accessed 17 December 2018].

[34] BBC, 'Five "Migrants" Picked up off Northern France', *BBC News*, 24 November 2018 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-46328818> [accessed 17 December 2018].

[35] BBC, 'Five "Migrants"'.

[36] I define 'deterrence' as the creation or mobilization of danger to dissuade people from carrying out certain acts.

Since the 2015 'European refugee crisis', the EU has increased its border-security measures and actors significantly.[37] The UK has played no small part in these changes, and UK visas and asylum have become ever harder to obtain via 'legal' routes. Between 2014 and 2018, the percentage of successful asylum applications reduced by 21%, with delays of six months or more increasing by 76% since 2016.[38] This has coincided with an increase in surveillance and border-security infrastructure between Calais and Kent: in September 2016, construction began on a border wall along the main road near the refugee camps, which has succeeded in preventing thousands of people from stowing away in lorries and ferries headed to the UK.[39] As both 'legal' and 'illegal' routes from Calais to Kent by air and land have become less achievable, it is unsurprising that entrants have resorted to the more dangerous avenue of the ocean. The UK government has effectively closed off all possible routes for migration, until only the riskiest remain.

This is a tried-and-tested technique in border security around the world. In his book *The Land of Open Graves*, Jason De León documents how the strategy of 'Prevention through Deterrence' has been used to shut down all but the most lethal routes through the desert from Mexico to the US border. In this way, the US Border Force mobilises 'the desert as a weapon', enlisting nature to do the dirty work of killing migrants and thus obfuscating the state's own accountability.[40] This strategy goes hand-in-hand with the criminalisation of smugglers and activists who attempt to guide migrants through borderlands, thereby justifying greater use of state force and again displacing blame onto a third party.[41] We see both of these tactics at work in the state and media representations of the Channel crossings, as the dangers of the hostile ocean and the actions of 'organised criminal and mafia networks',[42] along with the migrants themselves, are identified as the key villains of the story.

Such narratives subsequently become key justifications for yet further increase of border security. In multiple press releases about the Channel crossings, the Home Office has stated that it is 'alert to the risk posed' by these various parties and has 'stepped up deployments' accordingly, including opening a new joint intelligence centre with France immediately after the initial crossings in November 2018.[43] Thus, the cycle of risk-production continues, as migrants will likely be forced into ever more dangerous situations to avoid this new 'deterrent'.[44] As Itamar Mann incisively points out, '[deter] is a polite term for the idea that some migrants must suffer to prevent other migrants from seeking remedies'.[45] Although rarely acknowledged, it is clear that the conditions of risk in which migrants find themselves are far from accidental on the part of the UK government.

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[37] For instance, through the creation of the new European Border and Coast Guard Agency in 2016. See Kapitan Andreevo, 'Securing Europe's External Borders: Launch of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency', 6 October 2016, in *European Commission Press Release Database* <http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-3281_en.htm> [accessed 19 December 2018].

[38] May Bulman, 'Number of People Granted Asylum in UK Plummets by 26% in a Year', *Independent,* 26 August 2018 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/number-of-people-granted-asylum-in-uk-down-26-in-a-year-a8504206.html> [accessed 18 December 2018]; Home Office, 'National Statistics: Asylum', *Home Office*, 23 February 2017 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-october-to-december-2016/asylum#outcome-of-asylum-applications> [accessed 18 December 2018].

[39] BBC, 'Calais Migrants: Work Begins on UK-Funded Border Wall', *BBC News*, 20 September 2016 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-37421525> [accessed 19 December 2018]; BBC, 'Border Police Foil 56,000'.

[40] Jason De León, *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2015), p. 36.

[41] Nandita Sharma, 'Anti-Trafficking Rhetoric and the Making of a Global Apartheid', *National Women's Studies Association Journal*, 17.3 (2005), 88–111 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4317159>; Lorenzo Pezzani and Charles Heller, 'A Disobedient Gaze: Strategic Interventions in the Knowledge(s) of Maritime Borders', *Postcolonial Studies*, 16.3 (2013), 289–298 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2013.850047>.

[42] BBC, 'Why Are Iranians'.

[43] Home Office, 'Home Office in the Media Blog'; Home Office, 'Joint UK–France Centre'.

[44] BBC, 'Why Are Iranians'.

[45] Mann, pp. 4–5.

Concluding Remarks

In summary, this paper has traced the language of risk through BBC and Home Office representations of the Channel crossings, arguing that within the UK's oceanic borderlands, risk discourse is used to criminalise migrants, justify the perpetuation of harsh border policies, and ultimately colonise possible futures. As a rhetorical device, risk discourse encloses the uncertainty of the migrant journey within a bureaucratic framework of calculation, and projects deathly endings as the predictable outcomes of these crossings. Like Pedram in the BBC video, migrants are doomed to a bleak fate in a self-fulfilling prophecy, with the discursive implication that this is caused by their own reckless irresponsibility. Yet this narrative obscures a deeper thread in the web of causality, in which state policies intentionally eliminate safer migration routes, thus producing risk as the only option for many migrants seeking entry to the UK.

As a final contextualising thought, let us briefly step beyond the present case study to situate this within a greater history of the relationship between risk and the sea. The ocean has long been a site of uncertainty and danger, for colonial adventurers and pirates, slaves and merchants, travellers and migrants.[46] And since at least the modern period, the ocean has also been formulated as a zone of risk, speculation, and profit. As Peter Sloterdijk writes, the global system of capitalism could not have come into being without those risk-takers who sailed boats toward an unknown horizon, and the speculators who wagered money on the likelihood of their success: 'From the first moment on, the world system of capitalism [was] established under the interwoven auspices of the globe and speculation'.[47] Indeed, risk-taking is at the heart of both colonial accumulation and contemporary finance capitalism. Within this system, the risk-taking of some (such as undocumented subaltern migrants) is criminalised and immoralised, while the risk-taking of others (Western adventurers and entrepreneurial capitalists) is celebrated as an expression of human freedom and triumph. In this way, as well as those already mentioned, the discourse of risk is imbedded in an ongoing history of colonisation. Thus, the migrant boats crossing the oceanic borderlands of the Channel are always already implicated in an unequal field of risk relations. As we have seen throughout this paper, powerful entities – those that produce hegemonic narratives through state and media representations – have a moral monopoly on what constitutes justifiable risk-taking at sea.

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[46] Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh, *The Many-Headed Hydra* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 2000).

[47] Sloterdijk, p. 44.

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