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The child refugee in Calais: from invisibility to the 'suspect figure'



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Abstract

This paper examines child refugees in the context of Calais in France, contextualizing them against the politics of the 'Jungle' (a makeshift camp) in policy and media discourses in the UK by delineating three distinct phases in the discursive production of these sites in the enactment of this ambiguous entity. These three phases trace the spatio-temporal emergence of the child refugee in the camps to their arrival in the UK. These camps, as transient and symbolic formations inhabited by the 'dispossessed' of forced global migration, provide a context in which the figure of the child is enacted from its incidental appearance to its visible manifestation to its final configuration as the 'suspect figure' in the UK. Through Derridean 'hauntology' of absent presence, the child refugee captures the conflicted morality of the West. As a disenfranchised entity, the child, forged through the turbulence of the Jungle, can be collapsed through the primal and deprived of his or her status as a child (and, in tandem, protection from harm) in public discourses. The child positioned as a 'suspect figure' becomes a spectral reflection of the beleaguered West, wrestling with the ideational image of the child and its recurrence as a threat to its moral reserve.

Keywords: Calais, Child migrant, Migrant, Forced migration, Jungle, Suspect figures, Child refugee, Unaccompanied children

Introduction

Child refugees and unaccompanied children are problematic within the phenomenon of forced migration globally (Bhabha 2004; Derluyn and Broekaert 2008; Lems et al. 2020; Boyden and Hart 2007; Doná and Veale 2011). Child separations on the Mexican-American border re-invoke the brutality of border regimes and how sovereign states can exceed the legal limits in disciplining 'illegal entities', including children, at border crossings. Child refugees present a myriad of ethical, moral and legal challenges for authorities, governments as well as non-governmental organizations. The need to protect children in civilized society and as a mark of humanity invokes them within a conflicted domain of moral and social responsibilities against an increasingly wary attitude towards refugees and migrants

worldwide. Forced migration remains an issue of global concern. At the end of 2019, there were 79.5 million forcibly displaced people due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order, and among them are nearly 26 million refugees, around half of whom are under the age of 18 (unhcr.org).

In 2019, European countries recorded 672,935 new asylum seekers with nearly a third of them (202,945) children. This represents a slight increase of 6% compared to the same period in 2018 (191,800). Among children, 17,735 were considered unaccompanied and separated children while claiming asylum in Europe—13% less compared to 2018 (20,440) (unicef.org). Out of the total number of children (202,945) who sought international protection in Europe between January and December 2019, 71% were registered in four countries: Germany (35%), France (13%), Greece (12%) and Spain (11%) (unicef.org). The recognition of refugee children's rights and in tandem their enactment in immigration

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systems is dependent largely on the definition of children and refugees. With a recognition that the terms 'child' and 'refugee' are not consistently defined across discipline, together, the terms 'child' and 'refugee' position a minority category of the 'refugee child' as warranting a special premise for 'safeguards', 'care' and 'legal protection' by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Preamble (Lawrence et al. 2019: 4).

Fleeing from war and strife, child refugees undertake treacherous journeys and precarious conditions in their search for sanctuary and refuge. In 2016, Europol warned that 10,000 unaccompanied children had disappeared after arriving in Europe and that an entire criminal infrastructure had developed to capitalize on this migrant flow (Shabi 2016). Escalating police violence at the borders has also added to their arduous experiences. In the EU, politicization of migration has seen the emergence of hostility from far-right groups which perceive these inflows of people as a threat to their society, values and economy. In tandem with negative public opinion on migration in national politics, indigenous policy responses have become more draconian, violent and anti-humanitarian across the EU with vulnerable children remaining an issue of concern.

The response of the authorities to refugees and migrants at the border of Britain and France in Calais illustrates hardening anti-humanitarianism in response to the plight of children. Informal camps known as 'jungles' sprung up spontaneously in and around Calais almost immediately after the closure of the Red Cross shelter at Sangatte in 2002, and with the imposition by the French authorities of a *de facto* ban on any semi-permanent shelters for refugees and migrants (Ibrahim and Howarth 2017). Despite assertions by politicians that shelters served as a 'migrant magnet', their closure failed to deter a continued influx of those forcibly displaced first from conflict in the Balkans, then in Afghanistan, Iraq and North Africa. Over the next 16 years, a combination of passport controls at the border and ever-tightening securitization of transport routes restricted onward movement across the English Channel (Ibrahim and Howarth 2018). Calais became a bottleneck where growing numbers of refugees and migrants including children congregated in conditions of increasing squalor and deprivation.

The British policy response to the plight of refugees in Calais has been to argue it is a French problem and to focus their resources and attention on shoring up security fencing to ensure uninterrupted transit trade through the port and tunnel (Ibrahim and Howarth 2018). The French policy response has vacillated between ignoring the suffering of camp inhabitants and periodic demolitions of the informal camps as a material response to

assuage internal criticism about the increasing refugees in Calais. The fate of the children has fallen between the two disaffected nations engaged in cataloguing the blame on each other, with the dispossessed minors often left to NGOs and aid workers to fill the gaps and provide what limited support they can in a climate in which the French government views these respective humanitarian endeavours with increased suspicion (Rothwell 2018). In 2016, the government dismantled the Jungle and dispersed its occupants around the country, disorientating and re-traumatizing most of the child inhabitants of the camp. In 2017, French President Macron announced a 'zero tolerance' policy against migrants in which tented settlements or informal camps would no longer be tolerated.

In this article, the child refugee is located through the emergence and demolition of the Calais camps. The camp in Calais dubbed 'the Jungle' produced a vitriolic border politics between the UK and French governments with periodic demolitions of the camp from 2008 to 2016. The constant re-emergence of the camp along with the sustained dispersal of inhabitants and the resolve to eradicate the 'eyesore' from the spatial order of the French border town played out over time in media and policy discourses as a recurrent trope. Both the Jungle and the child lend to a social imaginary with the former representing the blighting of civilization and the latter a mythic figure which becomes a constant test of an 'evolved and humane' society. Beyond rational responses, the UK's need to present itself through the veneer of humanitarianism against a hard-line Europe showcased a confused approach in view of its diminishing humanitarianism over a century (Ibrahim and Howarth 2018) and the fact that immigration policies become defining issues for political parties during election periods.

The entanglement of the 'child of the Other' within these camps and a violent migrant politics where they are not deserving of pity makes the child figure a problematic entity in the domestic politics of the UK as well as the EU. The dubbing of the camps as a 'jungle' meant that any inhabitant emerging from it is swathed within the metaphor of the untamed and unruly, constructed through the chaos of the camp rather than given to civilization. Calais, and subsequently the Mediterranean migrant crisis, became testing grounds for the UK in terms of its humanitarian response particularly the provision of sanctuary for child refugees. Tragically, the volume of refugees coming through the Mediterranean is recorded through the Missing Migrants Project (MMP) which has from 2014 to 2018 documented over 30,900 women, men and children who lost their lives while trying to reach other countries (World Migration Report 2020). During that time, the Mediterranean Sea

has seen the highest number of deaths, claiming the lives of at least 17,919 people, 64% of whose bodies have not been recovered. In 2015, the arrival of large numbers of migrants and refugees to Europe via the Mediterranean put pressure on the common European asylum system (World Migration Report 2020).

In this paper, in drawing on the context of refugee camps in Calais, the figure of the child in the camp is traced through media depictions and policy responses by delineating three distinct phases of the discursive production of the child refugee. The tracing of these discourses from 2008 till the removal of the camp in 2016 produced a dismembered child figure: part invisible, part animal, with the ability to morph into both a mythic and parasitic being through its association with the Jungle and the disdain with the ‘migrant’ as an opportunistic entity. These in tandem were reflected in fragmented policy responses tempered through public sentiments of extreme weariness to refugees and migrants in the UK and Europe.

Forced migration in Europe

As an essential human rights issue of the contemporary world, forced migration has produced the tragic and contested figure of the child refugee as needing protection yet not one which is wholly absorbed within the Western psyche. In 2015, the unaccompanied minor became a crisis figure throughout Europe with a surge in asylum applications in this category amounting to 88,300 applications (Lems et al. 2020: 320). In discussing this conflicted form through its popularization in the public domain in 2015, Lems et al. (2020): 320 point out that ‘the figure of the unaccompanied minor moved beyond the professional discursive realms, which had mainly been occupied by lawyers, children’s rights advocates, academics and NGOs, and started to permeate public debates, reconstituting the child through an affective public sphere.’ Enacted through this public imagination, they stood for both the embodiment and the human face of the forced migration crisis in the EU and equally the deep-seated threats and anxieties it engendered. Forced migration for children is invariably bound with trauma of loss (i.e. family, networks, security, support systems, etc.) and the impact of uprooting and relocating, establishing sense of community and identity and social isolation (Anderson 2001; Farwell 2001; Lie et al. 2001). Constituting a significant proportion of the international refugee population, child refugees often travel as members of families forced to flee persecution, forming at least 50% of the refugee population (Bhabha 2004). Others include unaccompanied refugee minors, abandoned or orphaned in refugee camps or war/conflict zones. Forming a vital aspect of policy deliberations in the West, separated child asylum seekers become assembled as victims or threatening/transgressive entities, invoking modes of

governance through control and re-education as well as salvation (Boyden and Hart 2007).

As minor refugees staying in an alien country, they face innumerable risks due to separation from their parents, traumatic journeys, exploitation or abuse (Derluyn and Broekaert 2008: 320; Doná and Veale 2011).). Unaccompanied minors are defined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as “children under 18 years of age who have been separated from both parents and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible to do so” (UNHCR, n.d.). “Children under 18 years of age who are separated from both parents or from the previous legal or customary primary caregiver” are categorized as separated children by UNHCR (2019). Despite this definition of minors categorized as under 18 years of age, this age threshold is not a universal standard with variation between countries ranging between 16 and 21 years. The variation in approaches to childhood experiences means that this can be culturally contextualized in terms of the definition of transition to adulthood or the sorts of tasks which may be attributed to a child as opposed to an adult (De Berry & Boyden, 2000). Adolescent forced migrants are also caught up in such tensions and, if unaccompanied, are offered protection under the UK’s 1989 Children’s Act rather than the 2004 Asylum and Immigration Act (Doná and Veale 2011). In the UK and Ireland, if there is an age dispute for a youth aged between 16 and 18 who may not seemingly comply into the category of a child, it will present difficulties in claiming asylum, and in such a situation, the burden of proof is on the young individual to prove they are under the age of 18 (Crawley 2007). Upon arrival where there is a dispute in ascertaining the age of the individual, they may be detained in Young Offenders’ Institutes or even in adult prisons. The criminalising of children thrusts a figure of pity into a threatening construct which is strictly monitored and managed.

Legal instruments of protection

Children as rights bearers are enshrined through national and international legal instruments. The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history, and it imposes a moral obligation on signatories to protect children defined as ‘every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier’ (Art. 1)¹. It asserts the primacy of the best interests of the child without discrimination and signatories are

¹See Convention on the Rights of the Child, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx#:~:text=Article%203,1,shall%20be%20a%20primary%20consideration.>

expected to protect children from ‘all forms’ of violence, abuse and neglect (Art. 19)². In addition, the UNCRC makes explicit provision for governments to provide appropriate protection and assistance to refugee children (Art 22)³. In 1996, the European Convention on the Exercise of Children’s Rights was signed and came into force in 2003 with the object of promoting the rights of children, granting them procedural rights and facilitating the exercise of those rights.

The mythology of Britain as a champion of both child rights and refugees has been at odds with the actions of successive governments. Despite the ratification of the UNCRC in 1991, successive Labour and Conservative governments have resisted pressure to incorporate the UNCRC into UK law, arguing that it is aspirational and have declined to incorporate the rights of complaint to the UN into British law (Joint Committee on Human Rights 2015). Instead, the UK’s moral obligation hinges on a broad commitment to ‘have regard to’ the rights articulated in the Convention when legislating. The Convention itself has no statutory power in the UK unless the provision falls under other legislation (e.g. for local authorities to care for child asylum seekers).

Within the EU, the main legal route for safe passage for any refugee is under the Dublin Regulations III which not only sets out where a claim for asylum should be made but also makes provision for the family unit⁴. An unaccompanied child can claim to be transferred to a country where they have close family or relatives and if it is in their best interest. The so-called Dublin children still need to apply for asylum when they arrive in the UK⁵, but the intention behind the law is to facilitate family reunification and obviate the need to make perilous journeys, particularly but not only if it involves children. However, in the recent crisis the southern border states bore a disproportionate burden and, after Britain and other states delayed transfers, began informally letting refugees slip through the net by not fingerprinting them (Sigona 2016). During the 2015 crisis, there was a de facto suspension of the Dublin regulations with the system virtually on the point of collapse. EU states are currently trying to negotiate a fourth incarnation of the Dublin system, but because of Brexit, the UK is excluded

and there is considerable uncertainty over the future of children, separated from family yet stranded in Europe when Britain leaves.

In specific terms, there are three British laws implicated in child refugee rights: the Children Acts (1989 and 2004)⁶ and the Dubs Amendment to the 2016 Immigration Act⁷. The Children Acts (1989 and 2004) sought to empower children, giving them a previously ‘unheard voice as victims’ (Davidson 2008) and imposing a statutory obligation on local councils to care for under-18’s who arrive in their area from abroad seeking protection. These have nevertheless been affected by austerity policies and cuts to council funding, putting a strain on local authorities in dealing with unaccompanied children entering the country and seeking asylum. The Dubs Amendment to the 2016 Immigration Act makes provision for an unspecified number of unaccompanied children already in the EU to be transferred to the UK where their claims for asylum would be heard. A major criticism with Dubs is that the oversight of child refugees falls under the Home Office and the rights and protections of child asylum seekers and refugees are subordinated to immigration imperatives (Joint Committee on Human Rights 2015). Another complication is that protections afforded by British law only protect the rights of children already in the UK and those outside its borders in the Jungles of Calais fall under French authorities. In 2018, Lord Dubs tabled an amendment to the Brexit bill that would require the government to seek during negotiations to keep EU family unity provisions in effect. The intention, according to Dubs, is to ensure that the ‘cold indifference’ of the government was not the determining factor in offering protection to children seeking refuge (O’Carroll 2018).

Refugee children in British and international law are categorized as dependents in immigration rules and legislation. The NGO community has been vocal in highlighting that children are often overlooked as ‘rights bearers’ (Bell 2008, p.9) despite a plethora of international treaties. Arguably, the proliferation of these is in part a recognition that the rights of the child are too often breached or ignored by the signatories of various international agreements. In reality, ‘children have always constituted a significant proportion of the international refugee population’ (Bhabha 2004, p.141), but a particularly vulnerable group are the ‘unaccompanied’ children who are orphaned or separated from both

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴See, ‘What is the Dublin III Regulation? Will it be affected by Brexit?’ (4 Nov 2019), <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/what-is-the-dublin-iii-regulation-will-it-be-affected-by-brexit/>

⁵Those joining under family reunion will normally receive leave to remain on the same basis as a family member, but their status becomes precarious if there is a family breakdown because leave to remain normally requires them to stay with their family. Where the child is accommodated by the council, it is usually under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 and falls under the UASC Home Office funding scheme (Coram Children’s Legal Centre 2019)

⁶See Reflections on the Children’s Act 1989 and 2004: <https://adcs.org.uk/general-subject/article/reflections>

⁷See Factsheet section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 (‘Dubs amendment’), (updated 27 July 2020): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/policy-statement-section-67-of-the-immigration-act-2016/factsheet-section-67-of-the-immigration-act-2016>

parents and for whom 'no person can be found who by law or custom has primary responsibility' (Ayotte and Williamson 2000).

The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees⁸ provides legitimacy and a driving force to refugee protection regimes. It is in theory age-neutral, but in reality, children are treated differently rather than as equals and the threats or dangers facing child asylum seekers are often ignored or trivialized. Child-specific persecution such as child abuse, child selling, or child trafficking are not considered to fall within the ambit of the five grounds for protection: race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group and political opinion (Bhabha 2004, p.142–144). The consequence is the children remain invisible with attention given to adult-centred issues (Sadoway 1996). The lacunae between the spirit of these conventions and its application, particularly within the constraints of the nation state, further add to the spectral dimension of the unaccompanied child refugee. Austerity politics, coupled with the coalescing of immigration imperatives with humanitarian initiatives, has left the Calais child a diminished entity in the legal dimension in terms of rights and legal protections.

The protection of the child and the civilized moral society

The suffering of children is symbolic of the exploitation of the powerless, the abuse of the defenceless and the defiling of innocence (King 1997:1). The entity of the child is constructed through this distinctive vulnerability, requiring societies and adults to have a moral obligation to protect them. Although concern for the rights of children is a recent development in Western thought, emerging in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries compared to human rights debated as early as the seventeenth century, children inhabit an affective moral realm in any developed polity. The pathos of the suffering child has the potential to prick the conscience of a society. Orphaned or separated from family with no adult to protect them, the unaccompanied child speaks of a vulnerability that in common perceptions of the Western social imaginary invokes an obligation to act and protect against potential harm and abuse. Their suffering and any form of depravity imposed on them is seen as a moral judgement on both the society and wider humanity (Sissay 2016). The unprotected child constructed in this way was an object of fascination and pathos but also critical in the ideational evolution of the notion of child rights and the normative obligation on societies to protect the child as a legal entrenchment in international treaties. The UK

equally draws on its historical romantic construction of itself as a humanitarian nation morally attuned to alleviating the suffering of the persecuted and offering them sanctuary by drawing on its Judeo-Christian tradition (Ibrahim and Howarth 2018).

In the modern history of Britain, the figure of the child (in the guise of the child refugee and unaccompanied minor) has re-ignited the nation's moral stance as a protector and saviour of the vulnerable. The persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany and the agenda to rescue Jewish children from the death camps saw the organization of the Kindertransport. Contrary to the popular belief of this being state-sponsored, the initiative was organized by private, philanthropic and religious individuals and organizations in Britain's Jewish and Quaker communities. Due to intense lobbying, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain temporarily waived immigration visa requirements for a limited number of unaccompanied children, but the organizations had to fund the operation and find sponsors and homes for the children. This initiative in media and political accounts appropriated a 'self-congratulatory narrative' emphasizing British humanitarian traditions and adding to Britain's mythologized image as protector of children and their rights (Sharples 2012). Other humanitarian initiatives such as the Child Sponsorship (CS) programmes which mobilize funds for International non-governmental organizations (INGO) have seen sustained growth in North America, Europe and the UK. CS has been identified as a key marketing tool for annual fundraising for INGOs binding the figure of the child as a construct of world harmony for these organizations in seeking sustained engagement from their donors (Watson and Clarke 2014).

As such, these initiatives draw on the iconography of the child in representing humanitarian values of solidarity, impartiality and humanity (Manzo 2008: 632). Scholars tracing the origins of humanitarian initiatives centring the child locate it to perhaps 1919 and then later to the need to feed children during the Great Depression (Watson and Clarke 2014; Freeman 1965). Again, it encapsulated the figure of the child as invoking complex power-transactional relationships and divergent belief systems between CS interventions and the values in the West about the conception of children in comparison to their community of origin (Bornstein 2001). The Global South, through its dependence and inability to protect the vulnerable figure of the child in its own terrain, accords the West the status of saviour, redeeming children from poverty and depravity. In tandem, these Orientalist stereotypes, evident in the communication strategies of INGOs, have been termed as 'development porn' (Mittelman and Neilson 2009: 387) reflecting the ideologically and emotionally exploitative strategies which draft the Global South through the dominance of

⁸See the 1951 Refugee Convention: <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/1951-refugee-convention.html>

the West. Fused through a paternalistic relationship, it solidifies this imagery of dependency and salvation by the West of the starving 'Third World' nations (Maddox 1993: 91). Hence the child figure is encoded through its hypervisibility and its idealization in the Western imagination, absorbing Western fantasies and desires as part of its formulation (Ibrahim 2019). Other historical events equally invoke the romance around British humanitarianism towards the child, for example the Save the Children charity (cf. The Times 2016) which had between 1919 and 1921 raised money to feed starving and destitute children in Germany after the allied wartime blockade of the country. Britain has a history of giving a mixed reception to child refugees which dates at least as far back as the Basque refugee children who were shipped across the Channel in the 1930s to escape the Spanish Civil War (Pistol 2017). It enacts the child as a spectral entity pulled through the nexus of invisibility/visibility and enormous biopolitical power which crisscrosses this figure in international conflicts, specifically with forced migration.

Unlike the European child refugee or the unaccompanied child which the Kindertransport child represented in the 1930s and 1940s, the Calais child is a more troubled, unsettled and unsettling entity. Born from the wombs of 'bare life' (Agamben 1998), devoid of human rights in the border politics between France and the UK, subjected to the violence of sovereign states and resurrected through the pitiful camps of the Jungle, the Calais child is an anomalous entity tapping both into the primal and visceral politics of migration as well as the contested morality of according children protection from harm in a developed polity. The Calais child transmutes the spatio-temporal madness of the border camp where the violence of the sovereign state in the guise of policy enactments and police brutality constantly confronts the virulence of the Jungle which can expand and threaten White civility while being amenable to protection and rights under international treaties. As the progeny of 'irresponsible adults' who have put their lives at risk in undertaking their quest for refuge where their lives are made worthless through attempted escapes into the UK, the Calais child is pledged to the unsacred ritual of seeking sanctuary (Ibrahim 2018).

Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* indexes, amongst others, 'victims of the oppression of capitalist imperialism' and the means to exorcise them (2006, p. xviii). Derrida's (2006) elicits the notion of hauntology as a means to deconstruct subjectivity, power and trauma induced through the metaphysics of absence rather than presence. For Derrida (2006), the spectre is distinguished through the furtive and ungraspable visibility of the invisible. Within such a formulation, the 'priority of being

and presence' is replaced with 'the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive' (cf. Davis 2005: 373). Derridean hauntology provides a means to deconstruct the subjectivity and its entanglement with power and political violence and how trauma is negated and diminished through its spectral dimensions. In the process, it reveals the bind between psychological trauma and the mechanisms within which political authority and structural violence are enacted. Thus, silences, erasures and modes of forgetting including forcible removals become part of this hauntology. These spectral figures demand social justice for those who are not yet present but living with this liminality, producing a tragic figure continuously ungrounded through modes of violence. As Huggan (2014): 231 posits, these spectres trigger anxiety due to their untimelessness in view of their general capacity to unsettle us and equally through the temporal uncertainty surrounding their appearance.

As such, the figure of the Calais child is entrapped through the 'marauding adult migrant' who will deplete the coffers of Britain and struggles to retain the status of a child. As a spectral entity absorbing the myriad layers of risk and hysteria attributed to the adult refugee body in official discourses, the Calais child transmutes these representations while being open to multiple iterations and avatars. This figure of pathos is however not foregrounded through the reality of human struggles nor the depravity of developed Western nations which encode these dispossessed entities as risk. As the by-product of the adult 'bare life', the Calais child is a troublesome entity in its periodic demands to elicit sympathy and pity from the British public. Rendered through the Jungle and produced through the parasitic politics of migration in the UK, this drawing of pity is deemed dilemmatic particularly when the projection of pity becomes an ambit to test the civility of an enlightened and humanitarian nation through the material act of providing refuge. It is within this dimension the Calais child is positioned as a transmutation drawing on the spatio-temporal assemblage of the Jungle, acquiring mythic and transformative qualities from the spectral dimensions of the adult refugee and this politics of desperation and indistinction between man and beast. The repeated demolitions of the Jungle concern the attempts to eradicate the visual and material presence of these entities to render them as not even worthy of even the Jungle, imposing a placelessness to this bodyless form. In so doing, these spectral entities are given over to periodic episodes of banishment and erasure. Their spectral modes are induced through a constant doubt over their status as both 'child' and 'refugee'. Their unrelenting 'returns' become a constant test of Western civility seeking to retain its ideational vision of the child.

The spectral and mythic elements of the Calais child are drawn from a wider ‘hauntology’ which migration projects elicit. The hardening of attitudes to immigration in Britain has been borne out by surveys on public opinion on immigration since the 1960s (Blinder and Richards 2018 for an overview). The trend is corroborated by the hostile reaction to the free movement of Romanians in the EU (Ibrahim and Howarth 2017b) and the xenophobic campaigns during the 2016 Brexit referendum which paid off by delivering a narrow victory for the leave side, which appears to reiterate the findings of the surveys. The de-humanizing and racist discourses which have likened those crossing the Mediterranean to ‘cockroaches’ (Usborne 2015) and the ministerial references to ‘swarming’ (Robinson et al. 2015) or ‘marauding migrants’ (Mortimer 2015) seem to concur with research that argues there is an ‘ethnic hierarchy’ in attitudes to immigration with the least wanted being non-Whites, non-Europeans and those from Muslim countries (Blinder and Richards 2018).

Deconstructing the child in Calais

In exploring how the figure of the child is constructed through the context of forced migration and the genealogy of the camps in Calais, the coverage of UK national newspapers supplemented with policy discourses between 2002 (the year of the closure of Sangatte) and June 2018 (when the children were a key element in critical Anglo-French negotiations for post-Brexit border arrangements) was mapped along with discourses in the UK parliament⁹. Three distinct phases were discerned in this timeline of coverage entailing the demolition and re-emergence of the camps in Calais, dovetailing with the increasing interest in the media about child refugees. Within these episodes of destruction and resurrection of the camp, the figure of the child emerges from an incidental presence to a visible entity from the first to the second phase. Their presence as real entities is marked in the third phase when they appear in the UK. The first phase from 2008 to 2009 culminated in the violent demolition of Jungle 1 in 2009¹⁰. The second phase saw the emergence of Jungle 2 in 2014 shaped by the dramatic growth of the camps. Public interest in the Jungle intensified during this period with the drownings in the

Mediterranean and with the arrival of refugees in this period subsuming Jungle 2 through a wider discourse of forced migration in Europe. This period also coincided with the 2015 ferry workers’ strike in Calais in tandem with gridlocked traffic in the Channel Tunnel in the summer of 2015. The third phase starting from 2016 saw the passage of the Dubs Amendment with increasing concern and anxiety over child refugees particularly after the first sighting of child refugees accepted by the UK. In these three distinct phases, the figure of the child emerges as an unstable entity amenable to multiple iterations, invisibility and hypervisibility shaped through the context of the camp and wider landscape of forced migration in Europe in public discourses and policy responses. These shifting and contesting representations construct them as spectral entities amenable to the myth of British humanitarianism and equally morphing into suspect figures not deserving pity or refuge. The three distinct phases outlined trace the enactment of the child in the jungle.

- i) First phase—from invisibility to selective visibility (2008–2009)

The first phase in the history of the camp from 2008 consisted of growing media attention to an expanding, squalid camp. For a significant proportion of the period from 2002 till 2008, the unaccompanied child refugee in Calais was largely invisible. With Jungle 1 premised primarily through its adult male inhabitants and criminal gangs, the figure of the child remained submerged, appearing as an incidental entity occasionally in Sangatte under the guise of humanitarian action or as dispersed entities after the 2009 demolition (Schuster 2003; Bulman 2017). The 2009 demolition stripped away the hiding places of the children, exposing their trauma and vulnerability to the public gaze. On the flip side, the children themselves were constructed through their elusive quality: stowaways on passing vehicles, hiding from police harassment, coming out to forage for firewood or in the queues for food provided by aid workers before melting back into the undergrowth (Bracchi 2009).

Their invisibility contributed to a silence as they were overlooked by the society in which they had sought protection, struggling for basic survival. UNHCR reported in 2008 that as many as 1609 unaccompanied refugee children had appeared before the Prosecutor of Calais (Mougne 2010). The emergence of the child figure after the demolition raised concerns for their welfare including calls for Britain to ‘home’ some of the displaced children (Allen 2009). The destruction of the camp materially forged the incidental figure of the child as a reality in the Jungle when previously it was primarily the malevolent adult male and the criminal gangs. The

⁹Parliamentary papers included the House of Commons library briefing notes, submissions to parliament by the Children’s Society, Save the Children and Refugee Children’s Consortium mostly since 2015 as well as three major select committee reports on the rights of refugee children, in particular unaccompanied minors. The search elicited 1172 news articles which mentioned the children in Calais and 54 parliamentary entries

¹⁰The first post-Sangatte (i.e. after 2002) mention of a child refugee was in 2006 (Perry 2006) with it acquiring prominence from 2008 when the child began to emerge as a material figure in the camps of Calais.

demolition and dispersal of the children in 2009 saw the emergence of risk discourses where these children were perceived as being at risk from human predators seeking to exploit them for sex or labour.

ii Disease, stench and death—the risky child (2014–2015)

The intervening years (2010–2013) again saw only sporadic coverage of the child with a resurgence in the second discernible phase of the Jungle. From 2014, when Jungle 2 started to emerge as a ‘tented settlement’, the figure of the child began to be captured in a plethora of images depicting camp life. This period constructed the child as part of the Jungle, highlighting the emergence of a Jungle community and its pseudo-normality envisaged through child-orientated facilities such as the Kids Café, a school and library (Agerholm 2016). The camp was still untamed and unruly with a lack of basic amenities (e.g. lights, water and sewers), the unknown dangers from violent gangs and the stench of human excrement and decomposing food waste (Chrisafis 2015). With the lack of clean water, the children were diseased entities, infested with parasites and their parents had gangrene wounds caused by razor wire while seeking to cross into the UK (Isakjee et al. 2015). This construction of the child through the decomposition of the camp rendered them distant through the filth and odour of the disordered Jungle. Jungle 2 was deemed ‘not fit for animals’ let alone children (Chrisafis 2015), reiterating the indistinction between animal and human in the camp. This child, imagined through the feral qualities of the Jungle, was not one instantly amenable to pity for the Western spectator.

The tented settlement had expanded rapidly in 2014 and 2015 against a backdrop of the unfolding crisis in the Mediterranean. Migratory flows across Europe inevitably swelled the numbers occupying the Jungle in Calais. In 2015, during a summer of disruption caused by a ferry workers’ strike, holidaymakers stuck in gridlocked traffic became first-hand witnesses to the desperate attempts of refugees and their children who took extraordinary risks to cross into the UK by stowing aboard passing vehicles, with many of these ‘sightings’ posted on social media. At least 88 ‘migrant’ deaths were reported between 1993 and 2018 in Calais (McIntyre and Rice-Oxley 2018). These figures included a number of children, some of whom had been seeking reunification with their families in Britain. Frustrated by the delays in processing their applications for safe transfer, they had attempted to cross the tunnel as stowaways (Naveed 2018). The poignant stories of bereaved families in Britain and traumatized friends trapped in the Jungle as well as the paupers’ graves in the local cemetery testified to

the real tragedies of these phantasmagoric entities. The viral images of Alan Kurdi’s dead body washed up on a beach most graphically illustrated the precariousness of young life and the enormous price being paid by innocent children. This momentarily galvanized the public to the plight of the refugee. It also turned the attention to the large numbers of unaccompanied children who roamed Europe and the risks they faced from human traffickers. Towards the end of 2015, pressure began to mount to create a Kindertransport-type scheme to rescue unaccompanied children already in the EU.

This period marked the distinct emergence of the child figure in the construction of the Jungle. The child figure associated with the adult who embraced the possibility of death and destruction to cross into Europe was pulled into discourses of risk and vulnerability in the Jungle. With the accumulation of human tragedies in the Mediterranean, the child in Calais became part of a wider pathos of children being vulnerable victims of forced migration in the EU but due to parents and adults who took enormous risks with their lives. In this period, the Calais child is both the half-human of the camp and equally re-read through the tragic drownings of children in the Mediterranean, amenable both to pity and its absolution, demise and resurrection through an anaemic cry for a humanitarian response.

iii Reconstituting the child as the suspect figure (2016 to June 2018)

The third phase from 2016 started with the legislative struggle to secure the Dubs Amendment, pressure to rescue the children before the progressive dismantling of the camp, and fears that those that were not transferred would fall into the hands of traffickers. The enactment of the Calais child through risk discourses was a resonant trope even before the demolition of Jungle 1 in 2009 with risk being attributed to unaccompanied children or making parents complicit or culpable for their plight, thereby absolving politicians of moral responsibility for a humane response. This period saw the Calais child come into close scrutiny from the British public with the arrival of child refugees in the UK under the Dubs Amendment in 2016. The faces captured in news images were deemed ‘suspiciously mature’ (Drury 2016) with face recognition technology used to verify their ages (Wright and Drury 2016). In the visceral public debates that ensued the ‘child’ was reconstituted as a gendered deceiver, the ‘man-child’, who in lying about his age had impersonated a child in order to enter the country (Beckford 2016), and robbed the place of ‘genuine’ children who remained trapped in desperate conditions in the Jungle. The good will and hospitality of the British public which was moved by the ‘pitiful’ images of

children were perceived as being abused (Reid 2016). These newly transferred child figures had become the suspicious 'man-child' who would pose unmitigated risk to other children in foster homes, schools and to the public at large (Beckford 2016).

Coded as deceptive figures, there were calls for stringent verification techniques such as the use of dental x-rays to verify ages (Weaver 2016). Critics claimed that these proposals to vet the children through biotechnologies such as DNA evoked 'Nazi associations', dehumanizing refugees and treating them 'like cattle' (Power 2016). The furore highlighted the volatile political sentiments around the issue of child refugees and the prevailing culture of disbelief and suspicion around the notion of who is or is not a child (House of Lords 2016).

With the demolition of the Jungle while children still lived there waiting for their claims to be processed by France and Britain, representations shifted again to the 'abandoned' child and those denied transfers under Dubs or Dublin. Within weeks of the camp's demolition, many had absconded from reception centres and begun to return to Calais only to encounter an even more hostile environment and conditions described as 'worse' than in the Jungle. French policies further dehumanized the unwanted and sought to further erode provision of basic human needs. Their plight was encapsulated in images of the sterile white container shelters temporarily erected to facilitate demolition of all that remained of the Jungle. This phase culminates in the return of growing numbers of child refugees to Calais where, under the 'zero tolerance' policy of the French, they were denied even the rudimentary shelters of the Jungle, returning them back to the untamed and invisible.

Government and policy responses to the child refugee

The privileging of security in Calais over humanitarian imperatives subsumed the child refugee into a politics of reticence under both the Cameron and the May administrations in the UK where immigration as a domestic issue can fracture support for governments and political parties. Despite the invocation of the UK's humanitarian tradition, the child figure confronted the recurrent discourse of risk, securitization and fears that humanitarian overtures may be seen as incentivizing refugees. The unaccompanied child refugee was folded into this political landscape, and hence, the initiatives to rescue these children were half-hearted and unnecessarily prolonged. As such, these initiatives became token gestures to retain the UK's symbolic commitment to being deemed a humanitarian nation and having a civilized approach to the abandoned figure of the child. In reality, the child remained 'spectralized' between the visceral politics of migration, on the one hand, and Britain's historic ideals,

on the other, but ultimately neglected because of a domestic public weary of migration. Hence, the policy responses tended to be framed through immigration imperatives rather than the need to deal with the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Europe through exceptional measures. This hauntology as an ontology in dealing with the child figure meant that policy responses were not only piecemeal but also half-hearted.

In 2018, Prime Minister May committed an additional £44m to further tighten security bringing the total British 'investment' in Calais to £170m over the previous decade (Chassany and Parker 2018). Championing a policy of vetting UN refugee in camps away from the borders of Europe, the UK displayed extreme caution in its approach to refugees already in Europe. As the crisis in North Africa and the Mediterranean escalated from 2014, Britain rejected a proposal for a quota system to redistribute those already in Europe more evenly across member states, arguing that this would incentivize migrants to 'risk their lives' taking perilous journeys across the Mediterranean or become prey to the 'vile trade in human beings' (May 2015a; May 2015b).

The UK, as the second largest bilateral donor to UN refugee camps in North Africa, launched schemes to transfer vulnerable Syrian refugees including children from those camps to Britain (Brokenshire 2014). These initiatives did little to appease critics who argued that government policy ran counter to its proud humanitarian ideals (Borger 2015). Despite the tragedy of Alan Kurdi as a turning point of public sentiment and calls from Save the Children to accept 3000 unaccompanied children already in Europe, the UK government was reluctant to accept unaccompanied children despite the fact that Britain has an obligation to do so under the Dublin Regulations (Helm 2016). Additionally, the Dubs Amendment, though humanitarian in spirit, reserved the right to reject claims where there was 'reason to believe' the presence of the child would not be 'conducive to public good' or they had assumed a 'false identity' (Goodwill 2017). The 'child' as a suspect figure and a potential risk loomed larger than the child as a figure of a pity.

The UK's approach and treatment of the unaccompanied child refugee was evident in the half-hearted implementation of Dubs and the long delays in effecting the transfers which were criticized as being at a 'level of incompetence verging on deep cynicism' (Curling 2017). With Home Office targets for transfers determined by what it deemed affordable rather than what the councils could accommodate, ministers did not take up additional spaces from London councils. When London councils published details of offers of spaces not taken up, they conceded an 'administrative error' and revised transfer targets from 350 to 480 (Rogers 2017).

The long delays left vulnerable children at risk (from self-harm, suicide, sexual/labour exploitation and traffickers) and languishing in poorly supported reception centres in Europe or eking out an existence in inhuman conditions in Calais. Even though priority under Dubs was to be given to children in France, Italy and Greece (Curling 2017), lawyers noted that it took 6 months before the first transfer from Calais, 10 months before the 'specified' number was declared, and 20 months before the first child from Greece was brought to the UK, and by January 2018, not a single child from Italy had been relocated (Help Refugees 2018).

In late 2016, ministers confirmed that 900 unaccompanied children had been transferred to the UK from Europe under various schemes including 200 under Dubs (Home Office 2018), and in early 2017, ministers announced that that the scheme would be closed. Their justification was that 8000 children had been resettled in 2016 under other resettlement schemes including those from camps in or near Syria and that the specified number of 350 'reasonably meets the intention and spirit behind the provision' of the Dubs amendment and the scheme had 'incentivized' children making perilous journeys across Europe (Addley 2017).

Beyond the long delays, the Home Office's handling of refugees was criticized for the absence of procedural safeguards for unaccompanied children seen as ineligible for transfer (Help Refugees 2018). Many of the unaccompanied children in the Jungle who thought they were to be transferred were told, often in groups and without much of an explanation, why they were refused relocation to the UK, re-traumatizing many who had already endured much hardship (Help Refugees 2018). The overarching impression was one of 'cold indifference' to the suffering of the Other (O'Carroll 2018).

Some of the Calais children, with close family in Britain and who had the legal right under the Dublin Regulations III to safely join their families and from where they could apply for asylum, became fatalities in attempting to make the crossing. Trapped in a limbo by long delays in processing their claims, they took fateful risks at times resulting in death (Naveed 2018). The Dublin Regulations are intended to obviate the need for risky journeys, enshrining in European law the right to family reunion. However, in reality, prolonged delays and lengthy processes added to the trauma of these dispossessed children. The family reunions and the rights of unaccompanied children stranded in Europe will be further jeopardized by Brexit. It was estimated that 200 'Dublin children' in France and up to 2000 in Greece (Dubs 2018) could see their main legal and safe route to Britain closed and their right to family reunion jeopardized with Britain's exit from the EU.

Conclusion

This paper reviewed the construction of the child refugee in Calais. It traced their depiction in media discourses and policy responses through the refugee camps (i.e. the Jungles) in Calais from 2002 till June 2018 through three distinct phases from their incidental appearance, visible presence, to their arrival in the UK as material entities. The figure of the child emerges through periods of intense invisibility and silence while being intrinsically enmeshed with the Jungles of Calais both in terms of those camps' growth, consolidation and periods of demolition culminating in a 'zero-tolerance' policy against shelters in the border zones. Crafted through the wombs of Agamben's (1998) 'bare life' where they are both subjected to the laws of the sovereign state and violence beyond legal jurisdiction, they become liminal figures in reflecting the (in)humanity and depravity of the 'civilized' and 'enlightened' EU. Their absence and constant dislocation from the status of children to be conjoined with the suspect figures of migration position them as spectral entities who are formed and reformed through the visceral politics of migration in the EU and UK. Amenable to both periodic episodes of pity and its retraction from European governments and asylum systems which prolong their incarceration and trauma, they are constantly at risk of erasure (through demolition of their makeshift camps), death (as fatalities making their perilous journeys) or being subsumed as statistics in the complex process of claiming asylum. The hostility against the Other and the backdrop of the Jungle as a refugee camp provide a context to constantly transform these entities both through the mythopoetic imagination of a 'humanitarian' nation and its contested reception to child refugees throughout history. The policy responses reflect the same unease where the children already in Europe present both administrative and humanitarian challenges for the government. The tokenism and half-hearted administration of Dubs and equally the first encounter of the 'man-child' in the UK reveal the child figure as an unsettled entity. Its actual materialization in the UK and calls to use biotechnologies to test whether it really is a 'child' reaffirm its spectral status as both the ghost of the 'suspect migrant' and the feral Jungle which will invade and corrupt White civility while exploiting its politics of pity towards the child. The Calais child imagined through the brutal politics of migration in the EU and mythologized through the UK's humanitarian tradition is an entity criss-crossed through numerous 'hauntologies' (Derrida 2006) including the social imaginary of the feral and barbaric Jungle lending to the representations of the parasitic and opportunistic migrant. This meant that they could be re-imagined through criminal discourses as fraudsters or obliterated as threatening entities.

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