

THE AFFECTIVE BIOPOLITICS OF MIGRATION

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In his recently published memoirs, the former Danish Minister of Justice Søren Pind (2019) reveals that in 2015, when many refugees crossed into the European Union (EU), the Danish conservative-liberal government made detailed plans to erect a wall on the border between Denmark and its southern neighbour, Germany, to stop refugees from entering into the Danish territory. The border wall project was never presented to the Danish public, and the plans and preparations were eventually abandoned, partly due to a lack of construction materials. Four years later, a few media outlets have now paraphrased Pind's recollection of the border plans, but they have not made headlines or prompted wider discussion in Denmark. The fact that the Danish Government made such plans during a time when Donald Trump was campaigning and later elected as president on the promise of building a wall on the US–Mexico border calls for retrospective reflection and scrutiny, but so does the apathy and absence of political interest in the disclosure of the plans.¹ The retroactive national acceptance of erecting physical border walls to keep refugees out must be seen in the context of a powerful circulation of affective images within a political discourse that construes migrants and refugees as dangerous and about to 'overtake' Denmark and Europe. For example, in early December 2016, Kenneth Kristensen Berth, then a member of parliament for the Danish People's Party, suggested on national television that refugees attempting to cross the Mediterranean should be shot at if their boats entered the territorial waters of a European country (DR 2016). In August 2019, Pernille Vermund, an MP for the New Right, linked the influx of refugees in 2015 to an increase in the numbers of reported rapes in the same year and called on the Minister of Justice to investigate this connection (Brems Knudsen & Sørensen 2019). As these examples illustrate, the management of migration increasingly takes place through the invocation and governing of public and

personal affect, conjuring imagery of threat and danger to naturalise an aggressive attitude towards migrants.

Consequently, studies of migration have begun to scrutinise the affective aspects of borders and biopolitics in more detail. This special issue of *NJMR* contributes to the field of Nordic migration research by investigating the intersections between migration, affect and biopolitics. Affective biopolitics is a term that grapples with how the construction, policing and maintenance of borders increasingly occur through the structuring and production of emotion or 'affects'. The point is not that affect replaces racism as the caesura between life and death (Foucault 2003). Rather, affective biopolitics examines the connections between affect and racism (Ahmed 2000, 2004b, 2010) which allow for bio- and necropower (Mbembe 2003) to expose some populations to death while other populations are afforded mobility and access to rights and resources. This special issue of *NJMR* offers various perspectives on affect, and it addresses complex emotional responses to migration in order to refine our understandings of how different forms of migration in the Nordic region are conceptually and politically governed in relation to affect. The articles' focus on love, family and kinship reflects how these areas have become battlefields for regulating migration across the Global North. In the following, we offer a brief outline of how the 'affective turn' has influenced and shaped human and social sciences, as well as its possible implications for the investigation of bordering and biopolitics in migration studies.

The 'affective turn' in migration studies

How the affective realm can be thought of as a part of (non)human life has been the object of increasing interest for researchers in recent years. Emotion or affect² may be investigated from the perspectives of several disciplines, including, but not limited to, psychology, sociology, history, philosophy, arts and culture, neuroscience and biology (Gregg & Seigworth 2010; Koivunen 2010; Probyn 2005; Sedgwick & Frank 1995). Of particular interest in this special issue is how affect has been discussed in the intersections between post/de-colonial, feminist and queer theories and thus how an affective perspective has influenced research on racialisation, gender and sexuality. A key aim for the affective turn is to understand how power relations and identities are formed within affective narratives and practices. For instance, how can the humanity of precarious populations be rethought in relation to the construction of their relative *grieveability* (Butler 2004, 2009; Nebeling Petersen & Bissenbakker 2019)? And how might we think of societies and nations as *affective communities* that acquire meaning in part through constructing outsiders as *affect aliens* (Ahmed 2004b; 2010; Cvetkovich 2007; Haavisto 2014)?

For migration studies, the affective turn is relevant both as a lens to investigate affect as a specific subject and theme in migration processes and as a description of how bordering and governmentality work on a more abstract level. As *an object of analysis*, the study of affect and migration may look at how emotions play a role in the experience of migrating people and the decisions of practitioners in the field. This encompasses the feelings of belonging that are (or are not) associated with a person's attachment to a geographical

place (Yuval-Davis 2011), including one's degree of affective integration, understood as an emotional response to (not) being fully included in citizenship (McMillan 2017). It may also look at the feeling of (not) being 'at ease' with ethnic, cultural and racial diversity (Lapiņa 2016). As Boccagni and Baldassar have argued in their comprehensive mapping of the field of emotion and migration, 'a focus on emotion, within migrant life trajectories, is valuable to delve further into their subjective views, identifications and ways of belonging, against overly structural accounts about them' (Boccagni & Baldassar 2015: 79).

Considered as an *instrument of and target for biopolitical instrumentalization*, affect can also be analysed as an instance of concrete and symbolic border control. The operationalisation of belonging for political uses entails 'not only constructions of boundaries but also the inclusion or exclusion of particular people, social categories and groupings within these boundaries' (Yuval-Davis 2011: 18). This may, for example, take place through the symbolic construction of the entire field of migration as fraught with danger and threats to security, that is, associated with dangerous populations and populations at risk (Foucault 2007; Gressgård & Jensen 2016). It may appear as affective bordering in the form of nostalgia and sentimentality as well as hostility and hate in popular culture and everyday life (Danbolt 2017; Haavisto 2014; Loftsdóttir 2017). Or it may take the form of recasting fundamental rights as feelings of individual compassion (Muftee & Lundberg 2016). As a particular form of governmentality (Foucault 1978, 1982, 2003, 2007), we can think of the governing of/through affect as a mode of 'affective citizenship' (Fortier 2010; Gressgård 2016) that 'draws on and targets the affective subject for certain strategies and regulations aimed at designing people's behaviours and attitudes' (Fortier 2010: 20). Modern marriage migration laws have also been investigated as 'technologies of love' that implicitly promise that 'demonstration of love for one's country can be convincingly measured' (D'Aoust 2013: 265). Likewise, the very concept of being *attached* to a nation or a family may be understood as one particular way of 'instrumentalizing the biopolitical potential of affect' (Bissenbakker 2019).

Research on the regulation of social categories and structural inequalities increasingly considers how such categories and structures are organised in relation to emotional ideals and through specific affective economies (Ahmed 2004a; D'Aoust 2014). In a Nordic context, an emerging body of research examines how migration is governed through love and intimacy (see e.g. Fair 2010; Mühleisen, Røthing & Svendsen 2012; Myong & Bissenbakker 2016; Myong & Trige Andersen 2015; Myrdahl 2010; Stubberud 2016). Such studies highlight how affective biopolitical regulation on both macro- and micro-levels is informed by gendered, racialised and sexualised norms that lead to inclusion and exclusion of specific forms of intimate migration.

Articles

Through the foregrounding of affect – empirically as well as theoretically – the articles invite readers to investigate different affective aspects of migration. This entails both seeking to

understand how it feels to be subjected to the migration system and analysing affective politics as a structural phenomenon. The articles constitute an analytical intervention and transdisciplinary foray into the affective aspects of biopolitical migration regulation in the Nordic countries. The contributors come from diverse academic backgrounds in cultural studies, gender and sexuality studies, educational studies, global studies, media studies, sociology and political science, but all share an analytical interest in the intersections of the intimate aspects of migration. There is a shared focus on issues related to family migration, reproduction, care work and migrating youth in vulnerable circumstances. Spanning an empirical archive that includes legal texts, policy documents, news media reports, TV series, qualitative interviews and ethnographic work, the articles cross-fertilise each other by examining interrelated dimensions of contemporary affective biopolitical governance.

In the first article, 'Family Migration and Integration – The need for a new research agenda', Helga Eggebø and Jan-Paul Brekke offer an overview of existing research on family migration in Norway and Denmark. The analysis shows that much of the research on family migration has focussed on family migrants' integration in the contexts of the labour market and intra-ethnic marriages, while another influential strand of research has focussed on the consequences of family migration regulation. Pointing to the limitations of these approaches, Eggebø and Brekke call for a new research agenda that looks beyond labour market participation and intra-ethnic marriages. A new research agenda must include studies of other family members, including children, multiple dimensions of integration as well as more studies of long-term effects and post-entry access to rights.

'A Wager for Life: Queer children seeking asylum in Norway', by Elisabeth Stubberud, Deniz Akin and Stine H. Bang Svendsen, is an example of how children's affective experiences of migration management can be centred and how the analytical scope of migration studies can be adjusted through an emphasis on affect. The article examines hope, fear and despair as the lived effects of the asylum institute that produce disposability and enhance proximity to death. The article is based on qualitative interviews with unaccompanied children who have come to Norway seeking asylum. Through careful and caring readings of these narratives saturated with hope and despair, as well as a need to 'make emotional sense' of the children's situation, the authors argue that the asylum institute produces what Maldonado-Torres (2007) has conceptualised as 'the coloniality of Being': a life without protection. The asylum institute is imbued with a scepticism that subjects the children to a cruel logic in which protection is a privilege granted by the state and not a fundamental human right. As argued by the authors, this form of necropolitics means that we must think of the institute as extending (instead of ending) the experiences of being a victim of war.

Next, follow two articles that in different ways examine the affective technologies of migration regulation and legislation. In 'Governing parental desires and vulnerabilities: Affective biopolitics in the context of Norwegian citizens' repro-migration', Ingvill Stuvøy investigates the legislative process that led the Norwegian parliament to pass an addendum to the Norwegian Biotechnology Act in 2013. The addendum states that private individuals cannot be punished for involvement in surrogacy. Stuvøy deploys the concepts of reproductive vulnerability and reproductive desire in her analysis of the legislative process,

and she shows how the affective dimensions of vulnerability and desire became attached to (white, Norwegian) bodies travelling for surrogacy; something which placed them above punishment. The analysis is concerned with how the legislative process facilitated transnational surrogacy as a form of repro-migration.

The article 'Documenting attachment: Affective border control in applications for family reunification', by Sofie Jeholm and Mons Bissenbakker, investigates the practice of documenting national attachment within the legislative context of the Danish 'attachment requirement' (2000–2018). Based on readings of the Danish Immigration Service's 'application packets', the applicants who are seeking family reunification are required to document their attachment to Denmark, the authors propose that the application forms can be understood as orientation devices that ultimately direct the migrants towards the nation as a happy object. Thus, the article suggests that we can think of migration management as a form of affective border control – folding bodies in and out of the nation through the demand for an affective orientation that may have cruel implications for the migrating family.

The issue ends with two articles that investigate how the politics of borders, difference and belonging are negotiated and (re)imagined in media representations and science fiction. In 'White Danish Love as Affective Intervention: Studying media representations of family reunification involving children', Asta Smedegaard Nielsen and Lene Myong analyse how the Danish media reported on the case of the young girl Liu Yiming, whose residency in Denmark was initially denied and then granted following public pressure. The analysis suggests that the representations of Yiming as naturally belonging to her local Danish community as an 'integrated' (and thus 'worthy') migrant child formed the basis for white public outpourings of love and affection. In this way, the article wrestles with the politics of white love, and how this form of collective affect may be conceptualised as an affective intervention imbricated in exceptionalist politics and white nation-building processes.

A more hopeful analysis concludes the issue. Ingvil Hellstrand, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen and Sara Orning are the authors of 'Real Humans? Affective imaginaries of the human and its Others in the Swedish TV series *Äkta människor*'. The article explores how imaginaries and narratives may produce affective scenarios that challenge dominant formations of sameness and difference. Through an analysis of *Äkta människor*, a science fiction production that revolves around two humanoid robots (hubots), the authors investigate Othering as complex processes that work to align some bodies and functions with the not-quite human. The article suggests that the hubots may be seen as affective imaginaries that highlight the ambivalent and contextual nature of both stereotypes and humanity itself but also that fictional narratives can open up new trajectories and possibilities of relating to and thinking about Others.

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Notes

1. It should be noted that even though the plans to build an anti-refugee wall on the border between Germany and Denmark was cancelled, the first step to erect a 'wild boar fence' on the same border was taken in early 2019. The previous year a majority of parties in the Danish parliament voted in favour of the fence. The main argument was that in order to prevent an outbreak of African swine fever – which would be damaging for Denmark's large pig industry – wild boars should be stopped from entering into the Danish territory. The plans to erect the anti-wild boar fence were met with strong opposition from both environmental organisations and stakeholders in the Danish–German borderlands such as *Grænseforeningen (the Danish Border Association)* (see e.g. Therkelsen 2019).
2. The discussion about whether to use the concept *affect*, *emotion*, *feeling* or *sensation* is sometimes highlighted by writers associated with the affective turn (cf. Pellegrini & Puar 2009). To some researchers, the differences between these concepts are crucial, as they point to a distinction between affect as biological and psychological nature versus emotion as cultural and social expression (Probyn 2005: 11), which again signifies a fundamental difference between the pre- and post-discursive life of affect and emotion (Massumi 2002). However, researchers in the intersectional field between decolonial, queer and feminist theories seem to have a preference for using the terms *affect* and *emotion* and to use the two terms somewhat interchangeably. Ahmed famously claims that 'the distinction between affect/emotion can under-describe the work of emotions, which involve forms of intensity, bodily orientation, and direction that are not simply about 'subjective content' or qualification of intensity. Emotions are not 'after-thoughts' but shape how bodies are moved by the worlds they inhabit' (Ahmed 2010: 230).

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