

Monsters

In February 2016 the British news media doggedly reported on the conviction of five suspects charged with the sexual abuse of minors in the northern English town of Rotherham. Since revelations of child sexual exploitation (CSE) emerged in the press in 2012, the very word 'Rotherham' (and to a similar extent the name of another northern town, Rochdale) had steadily become synonymous in the public imagination with CSE or 'grooming' scandals. The scale of the abuse transformed these convictions into a site of moral panic, with authorities suggesting that approximately 1,400 children in Rotherham alone could have been targets of exploitation over a fifteen-year period (Jay 2014). However, what framed this scandal and energised the parameters of the moral panic was a competing set of racialised and sexualised imaginaries and logics. This worked to make the scandal one that concerned multiculturalism, citizenship and 'integration'.

Despite the fact that two of those convicted in Rotherham were white women, the news coverage focused almost exclusively on the background of the male perpetrators who, whilst all holding British citizenship, were described as 'Asian', 'Muslim', 'British Pakistani'. The victims of such abuse were almost uniformly presented as 'white girls'. As with previous cases of 'street grooming' this led to mass outpourings of anger, disgust, hate and revilement. Such emotional circulations coalesced around easily available tropes which relied upon codes of orientalist deviancy and the symbolic power of interracial rape: the 'monstrous' and 'evil' paedophile, the 'Asian grooming gang',

the patriarchal, women-hating Muslim man. This took place alongside the steady whitening of the female victims, who were transformed from marginalised and dismissed ‘child prostitutes’ (a common category used by police and local authorities) into ‘daughters of the nation’.

Speaking after the trial in Rotherham, the victims’ solicitor David Greenwood made it clear that what happened in the town was not a unique case but one that was endlessly repeated throughout the whole of modern Britain:

This trial is just the first of many and is the tip of a very big iceberg. From the work I have done, it appears that gangs of Asian men have been operating to sexually abuse young white girls in Rotherham, Oxford, Keighley, Bradford and Rochdale. (Quoted in Cusick 2016)

This abuse was termed endemic and systematic. Unlike other examples of child abuse and paedophilia, which tend to be presented in terms of unique contexts and circumstances (Wilson 2018), what happened in Rotherham could act as stand in for Bradford or Oxford. Why? Because this involved ‘Asian’, ‘Muslim’, ‘British Pakistani’ men and the very presence of these racialised signifiers meant that we are already supposed to know why these tragic events happened. As former cabinet minister Jack Straw would argue, to many Pakistani men these white girls are merely ‘easy meat’ (BBC 2011).

Seizing the opportunity to capitalise on the public mood of outrage surrounding these convictions, then Home Secretary Theresa May immediately pledged that those convicted of CSE, but more specifically ‘street grooming’, could and *would* be deprived of British citizenship and then deported. Through applying long-standing powers to deprive naturalised citizens of citizenship, renovated under successive counter-terrorism and immigration acts (see Home Office 2002, 2014b; HM Government 2006), the Home Office (quoted in Chambre 2016) reminded the press that ‘citizenship is a privilege not a right. The Home Secretary can deprive an individual of their citizenship where it is believed it is conducive to the public good to do so.’

From 2002 to 2016, eighty-one subjects were deprived of their citizenship. In 2017 it was reported that in that year alone a further 104 were stripped of their rights. These figures also reflect the expanding number of people who have their passports removed by the state, and there are countless more who have had naturalisation and indefinite leave to remain applications refused, nearly all for issues relating (however loosely) to ‘terrorism’ (see Kapoor and Narkowicz 2019). The technical reasons for deprivation of citizenship are often linked to a clause regarding the ‘public good’ and/or charges of fraudulent claims (McGuinness and Gower 2017: 3). In 2018 the government continued to push for legislation which made it possible to strip *anyone* of citizenship, whether a naturalised citizen or born into citizenship, disregarding the international legal precedent over statelessness (Ross and Galey 2014; Anderson 2016; Javid 2019). In the context of this short history, the apparently exceptional acts of criminality relating to grooming became rendered as another form of terror. This justified the exceptional act of removing a subject’s citizenship and threatening to send the perpetrators, in the celebratory tone of one newspaper, ‘back to Pakistan’ (Scheerhout 2017).

In the fall out from the convictions, we can begin to see how events in Rotherham (and other cases of grooming nationally) shaped and energised numerous bordering practices – imprisonment, deprivation of citizenship, potential deportation. What was significant about this event is how ‘exceptional’ powers of deprivation of citizenship were targeted at these criminal citizens. The expansion and intensification of deprivation of citizenship raises the question of the (im)possibility of British citizenship after empire.

Following the way that I discussed the practice of intimate bordering in the last chapter, here the border not only targets those with precarious migrant status but also those with settled rights and citizenship. Here we can see how borders transform the right of citizenship from a status of relative permanence into a different kind of temporal and bodied relationship to the state. From having settled rights, a citizen can become

subject to immigration law as a migrant. They can suddenly become akin to an 'illegal' migrant who can be subject to deportation. Through the threat of deprivation, the border can permeate and transform supposedly settled rights and make certain populations *deportable* within modern Britain (De Genova 2002). Significantly, this practice does not affect everyone (it is not every criminal that is subject to deprivation). Deprivation 'sticks' (Ahmed 2004) to certain bodies and slides off others.

In this chapter I want to examine how the case of Rotherham (and the scandal of 'grooming gangs' more widely) reveals how borders stretch, follow and 'stick' to certain bodies and populations. In doing so, this tells us about the limits of citizenship and how the British state continues to administrate through colonial and authoritarian techniques when it comes to certain populations. It also tells us how such practices are equally rationalised and justified based on colonial claims to who is or is not properly familial. If intimate bordering was central to the management of 'suspicious intimacies' that I examined in the last chapter, the 'sticky borders' I explore here are bound to 'monstrous intimacy' – that is, intimacies that are energised by disgust, revilement and hate. As with the case of the grooming scandals in Rotherham, monstrous intimacies are cast as intolerable and used to justify the use of exceptional authoritarian measures, such as deprivation of citizenship, used primarily against Muslimified populations and racialised citizens deemed to be without 'value'. As I go on to claim, monstrous intimacies are bound up with the endangering of the (white) family, which must be protected at all costs and through whatever means necessary.

In focusing on what the case of Rotherham tells us about contemporary citizenship, I ask what conditioned the promise to deprive CSE offenders of their citizenship, and in turn what allowed this to be celebrated with such glee. This follows into the next chapter where I examine where the power of deprivation came from and consider how this particular bordering 'sticks' through the shifting parameters of colonial notions of the (non)human.

The case I chose to explore here is a difficult one because of the violent nature of the crimes committed. However, the scandal of grooming has been made to *feel* exceptional in ways that are not comparable with other cases of CSE and this deserves careful attention. The presentation of the exceptional nature of these crimes tells us important things about the character of race in contemporary Britain. Equally, it tells us about how both race and racial violence enacted by the state and white nationalist organisations is hidden as the logical consequence of ‘defending’ the (white) family.¹

In the first section of the chapter, I examine how racialised masculinity plays a wider role in the contemporary political landscape in Britain and Europe, from the ‘refugee crisis’ to the war in Syria, to grooming gangs. I use these as examples to illustrate the relationship between monstrosity, violence and sticky borders. In the second part, I focus in more detail on the grooming scandal in Rotherham. Whilst detailing how the scandal was constructed and responded to, I consider emotional attachments around grooming to be important, primarily because grooming was made to seem so scandalous and exceptional as an event of incomparable violence. In using Sara Ahmed’s (2004) work on affect I explore how the act of grooming was rendered so monstrous, and how the thinkability and feelability of this violence conditioned how bordering practices stuck to those who were convicted of grooming. In order to evidence this, I look at both the wider media and state treatment of ‘grooming gangs’ and the body of ‘confessional’ (non-)fiction literature and novels published in the immediate aftermath of the grooming scandals. I suggest that we can only understand why the deprivation of citizenship becomes an option in such cases once we understand how grooming is presented as a site for the sovereign and emotional protection of the white (national) family against perverse others. This is shaped by the place of the family at the heart of white nationalism and colonial racism. If heteronormative ideas of family organise who is ‘unfamiliar’ and suspicious in modern Britain (as I argued in the last chapter), this equally organises who endangers the ‘real’ family and how these dangers should be eradicated. Relating to the

historical use of ‘family’ under the British Empire, I demonstrate here how family is still wrapped up with *dispossession* (of rights and life).

Of violence and monsters

Before going into the specifics of the events in Rotherham, they deserve to be situated in the wider context of racialised masculinity and the part it plays in the social landscape of twenty-first-century liberal states. Asylum seekers crossing the Mediterranean, gang violence, knife crime, child refugee resettlement schemes continue to be framed through a narrative of dangerous black and brown men (across Europe, Australia and North America in particular). Just as with the examples of the ‘black peril’ I explored in chapter 2, this relies on claims to sexual deviancy and the risk this poses to family life.

In 2016 the rise in the number of male asylum seekers in Cologne, Germany, was blamed for a spate of ‘sexually predatory’ attacks on women during New Year’s Eve celebrations (Smale 2016). Child refugees arriving in the UK as part of resettlement schemes have been consistently hounded by the British press who presented them as ‘burly lads’ rather than ‘real’ children (see chapter 6 for more on this). These reports went on to suggest that (child) refugees posed a sexual risk to ‘school girls’ and painted visions of such figures hanging around outside school gates (Greenhill 2016).

Equally, ‘gang culture’ has been blamed by London’s Metropolitan Police for a rise in knife crime in the city and for the civil unrest which broke out in 2011. Here black teenagers are rendered a particular type of masculinised danger. ‘Black culture’ as well as the reported absence of father figures and single-mother households are commonly cast as causal factors of this violence (see Starkey 2011).² Powerful circulations of deviant sexuality and race are materialised through these examples: the lusty, over/under-sexed colonised subject of orientalist obsession, the impossibility of ‘childhood’ for brown and black subjects, the failure of the black household and family. Following my previous discussion

of figurations, it is worth thinking here of how the figure of the dangerous brown and black man does important political work in driving colonial domestication.

Such figurations of dangerous masculinity persist as easily available means of explaining complex societal relations. They are able to sustain racial hierarchies and work on fears of proximity. They also work in the context of the evolving dictates of racialised capitalism where once useful populations of cheap and expendable labour have been made redundant and causally viewed as replaceable, surplus and 'undeserving' (Shilliam 2018). Here figurations of dangerous masculinity work to make populations even more precarious and subject to coercion from the state. This enhances existing inequalities and maximises profitability through the dual function of precarity and control (Lewis *et al.* 2014).

This is continuously animated by how whiteness is bound to *threatened innocence* and blackness to *sexual danger*. Such attachments work to fuel disciplinary practices of incarceration, stop and search, and restrictive immigration policies based on delimiting the movement and freedom of black and Asian men (see Elliott-Cooper 2016). We might consider here how immigration detention rates reflect wider patterns of imprisonment in the UK, where black and Asian men are disproportionately represented by almost exactly double.³ Sexuality and renderings of deviancy play an important role here. It is worth remembering that the hardening of modern racial categorisation and its governance has nearly always taken place around fears of intimacy and proximity (Stoler 1995). It is in the possibility of affective relations and sexual conduct that racism finds life.

This appeal to dangerous deviancy does important work in organising scales of the human. The 'bogus asylum seeker', 'black youth', 'Asian grooming gang' and equally the 'jihadi terrorist' are figurations that can arguably transform subjects into 'monsters'. The monster is a complex figure of modernity. Richard Kearney (2003) views the rise of the culture and aesthetic of monstrosity as a product of tensions and boundary-forming in the Renaissance, which produced the monster as a thing which was neither human nor non-human. However, monsters play a

particular role in colonial governance. Monsters propel fear; they mark the difference between the human/not-quite/non-human and work to both demand but also silence exceptional violence against them. To Foucault:

The monster's field of appearance is a juridico-biological domain. The figures of the half-human, half-animal being ..., of double individualities ..., of hermaphrodites ... in turn represented that double violation; what makes a human monster a monster is not just its exceptionality relative to the species form; it is the disturbance it brings to juridical regularities (whether it is a question of marriage laws, canons of baptism, or rules of inheritance). The human monster combines the impossible and the forbidden. (Quoted in Puar and Rai 2002: 118)

Monsters are coded through particular sensibilities and emotional circulations – fear, intrigue and repulsed fascination being key psychological phenomena (see Halberstam 1995: 8–10). The ‘double violation’ that Foucault speaks of is helpful for thinking through the contemporary colonial power of the monster. Monsters both disturb and sustain social order and necessitate the policing of boundaries. They threaten order but their eradication services its renewal. This codes violence into monstrous violence and then legitimate violence, which is called upon to protect against and destroy the monsters in the name of ‘normality’.

Missing from Foucault's account is the explicit attachment of monstrousness to race and the ease through which racialised bodies can be transformed into monstrous bodies. To Puar and Rai (2002) the monster is always a sexualised monster. This is because they actively threaten the hetero-domestic order of nation, family, household, thus their sexuality is always known through violence. It is a violent and uncivilised sexuality. Halberstam (1995: 3) views the monster as ‘embodied violence’: ‘The monster itself is an economic form in that it condenses various racial sexual threats to nation, capitalism and the bourgeoisie in one body.’ Tracing the contemporary racial codes of the monstrous, Christina Sharpe (2016) reminds us of how anti-black racism was constantly energised under slavery (and under Jim Crow and beyond) by depictions

of the unstoppable strength of the male slave, as an inherently violent and physical beast. The 'lust' of the black slave towards white women propelled both the eugenics obsession with miscegenation, and the depiction of *all* interracial intimacy as symbolic and physical rape. To invoke Fanon (1961: 32) here, we should remember that 'the colonist turns the colonised into the quintessence of evil'. Monstrousness thus sticks to certain bodies over others and demands exceptional violence to contain and eradicate it. The monster can work to demarcate between the human, not-quite-human and non-human.

The monster and the drone

Monsters play a particular role in the machinery of contemporary war and the geographies of heteronormativity and racism that accompany this. Tracing some of the contours of these dynamics shows how grooming is always/already networked into broader regimes of coloniality and violence. Just as the War on Terror has relied on policing of and intervention in 'suspicious intimacies', as I explored in the last chapter, the logic of this global 'war' has frequently relied upon invocations of the monster: from Al Qaeda and the Taliban through to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as new and evolving visions of evil (Puar and Rai 2002; Friis 2017). Significantly, the movement of European citizens to fight in the war in Syria and to join ISIS has expedited much of the public discussion about citizenship deprivation in Britain from 2010 onwards (BBC 2017; *Guardian* 2017; Hansard 2018). Fears that 'ISIS recruits' with British citizenship would return to cause destruction in the UK (and in other EU states) led to high-profile calls to deprive those travelling to Syria of their passports and stop them returning. In 2019, as the last strongholds of ISIS fell in Syria, the British government intensified the use of deprivation (for example, the case of Shamima Begum; see Javid 2019). Here affiliation with ISIS was to be rendered 'pathologically evil', as within the popular imagination ISIS represents the return of medievalism, known through markers of extreme orientalist

savagery and illegitimate violence (such as decapitations and crucifixion; see Friis 2017).

In 2015 Reyaad Khan and Ruhul Amin were reported as the first British citizens to be assassinated by RAF drone strike whilst fighting for ISIS in Syria. After the attack it was revealed that in 2012 the British state had also killed Bilal al-Berjawi and Mohamed Sakr whilst they were in Somalia. Prior to the attack they both had their citizenship removed (Woods and Ross 2013). After Khan and Amin's deaths, the *Sun* newspaper ran with the headline 'Wham! Bam! Thank you Cam,' in response to Prime Minister David Cameron's ordering of the strike. Against the monstrous violence of 'jihadi terrorism,' this violence was *felt* to be not only appropriate but in fact worthy of being celebrated. The government (and their lawyers) argued that these subjects became enemy combatants, situated as they were within 'war zones' (see Webb 2017). We learn here that the exceptional act of joining ISIS begets the exceptional act of removing citizenship, which is then accompanied by a spectacular yet normalised act of violence and death.

In 2017 Gavin Williamson, the secretary of state for defence, intensified the logic of this violence by arguing that all British citizens in Syria fighting for ISIS should be hunted down and killed: 'I do not believe that any terrorist, whether they come from this country or any other, should ever be allowed back into this country,' he said. 'We should do everything we can do to destroy and eliminate that threat ... A dead terrorist can't cause any harm to Britain' (quoted in Elgot 2017a). In this account of colonial war, the only good terrorist is a dead terrorist. The complexities of the Syrian civil war and the myriad of people involved in the conflict – humanitarian workers, theological converts, travellers – all become rendered 'terrorists'. We might consider here how monstrousness 'sticks' and transforms one-time British citizens into drone targets and bodies that need to be eliminated.

Monstrous violence is accompanied (and makes possible) 'legitimate' state violence. This has particular gendered and racialised-sexualised codes. Staying with the subject of the war in Syria, it is telling that questions of citizenship deprivation, extreme violence and the monstrous

have been almost entirely absent from the discussion of white British citizens who have joined Kurdish or other non-ISIS militia in Syria. White ‘fighters’ or ‘amateur soldiers’ returning to the UK have faced prosecution in court (rather than deprivation of citizenship or state-sanctioned death) and those who have died have been repatriated in ways that mimic that of the ‘fallen soldier’ (Murphy-Bates 2018). The parallel is significant: whilst for some subjects the rights of citizenship are eternal – not even deprivable in death – the removal of citizenship is a precursor to abandonment and then death for racialised others. How is it that some can experience social death in life whilst others do not experience social death in death?

War, the monster and grooming

Following these circulations of legitimate versus monstrous violence leads us eventually back to grooming scandals. In his preface to the book *Easy Meat* (McLoughlin 2016), self-confessed libertarian and far-right campaigner Gavin Boby offers a vignette which asks what a group of trained soldiers might do if they discovered the ‘truth’ about Asian grooming gangs in Britain.⁴ In answering, the vignette offers up connections between citizenship, violence and war in the UK, which plays to a particular constituency of white nationalism. Boby goes on to describe how disgruntled soldiers could begin to explore vigilante justice by violently murdering the ‘bearded thugs’ and ‘Asian perpetrators’ of crimes against white women (McLoughlin 2016). The book asks readers to consider the normality of this violence and its immanence. Boby’s account asks the reader to consider this martial violence as a necessary outcome of grooming. The argument presented is that this is only a natural reaction to state inaction and the real threat posed to white women (who are, of course, portrayed in patriarchy familial terms as ‘wives’, ‘mothers’, ‘sisters’) by ‘Asian men’. Violence is merely the protection of the white nation by its warrior sons. Boby’s martial fantasy of white supremacy ends with the breakdown of law and order and the

start of a 'race war' on Britain's streets. War comes 'home' through the sexualised terror of the brown man and the just violence of the unmarked yet white 'soldier'.

What is concerning is how Bobby's fantasy is actually far from extreme. In fact, it plays to a significant set of circulations that have become central to bordering practices in the UK and also connects up with many accepted narratives which have underpinned state policy towards grooming. Here the monstrousness of ISIS slides into the case of grooming in Rotherham through a continuum of racialised sexuality and violence. As a practice, the deprivation of citizenship binds together different monstrous bodies which blur the boundaries of colonial war from Syria and Somalia to Rotherham. They become linked together because of what is done to citizenship through bordering: deprivation is used to stop subjects returning to the UK, so they can be expelled and deported, so they can be killed with impunity. These sites are also joined together because of the way that they are rendered places of the monstrous. The 'Asian grooming gang' and the 'ISIS recruit' are made knowable as cultural problems of Islam – rendered a monstrous threat to the West. These events elide and collide as they work to animate further racialised violence which is either condoned or enacted by the state. Here the figure of the monster walks the border between citizen/non-citizen, human/non-human, and life/death.

Grooming, affect and the white (national) body

If monstrousness makes particular circulations of colonial violence possible, I want to probe in this section what underpins particular figurations of the monster. I do this by turning in more detail towards the way that grooming in Rotherham and beyond have been made sense of. By 'made sense of', I am interested in how these events are made socially meaningful but also, working off the *affective* dimension of sense, how these events are made 'feelable' through particular atmospheres and emotional circulations. This traces the affective politics of grooming

by bearing in mind how the connection between events and their thinkability and feelability are historically produced. In following Ahmed, we should consider how emotions circulate to materialise particular political forces (Ahmed 2004: 11). I find this a productive way of exploring how the call to deprive convicted sex offenders of their citizenship was first made possible, and then welcomed with such glee. It helps us understand why, alongside monstrosity, borders follow and stick to certain bodies and not others.

From 2010, widespread media, public and policy debate in the UK began to focus on grooming as a new criminal act. As Cockbain (2013: 23) argues, this was presented as a new form of 'racial crime threat', with what became known as 'street grooming' inextricably associated with 'Asian sex gangs' who were imagined to be deliberately seeking out white girls for repeated and horrific sexual abuse. In January 2011 *The Times* carried a story titled 'Revealed: conspiracy of silence on UK sex gangs'. The article claimed to have discovered the emerging crime of street grooming, a particular form of CSE where vulnerable girls (and to a lesser extent boys) were targeted by groups of people (*The Times* 2011). These 'Asian gangs' falsely befriended children and young women through the promise of access to alcohol and recreational drugs before raping and abusing them, often for a number of years.

Rotherham was presented as the centre of this new crime wave, which was described as a 'plague on northern English towns' (Cockbain 2013). Part of the coding of the scandal was a focus on the lack of response by the authorities who, it was claimed, were failing to tackle widespread cases involving Asian male offenders sexually abusing white British girls for 'fear of being branded racist' (Cockbain 2013; Jay 2014; Casey 2015). The charge was made that 'multiculturalism' in Britain had caused this. Not only was this blamed on the perverse actions of ethnic minority men but it was 'political correctness' and 'respect for community difference' that allowed such crimes to go unchallenged. Whilst evidence emerged describing the heterogeneous

character of victims, who were from variety of backgrounds (Peach *et al.* 2015), the dominant framing of the victims of grooming was as ‘white girls’.

Whilst previous stories of sexual abuse and rape garnered much less public attention (Wilson 2018), this developed into a ‘scandal’ with the government launching several independent investigations into the abuse (Jay 2014) and the running of local government services in Rotherham (Casey 2015). Indeed, the push to deprive of citizenship those convicted of grooming is directly animated by how this was deemed so scandalous. Scandals here can be thought as a ‘moral panic’ or a crisis in a particular moral order – that is, the exceptional moment that breaks apparently settled norms (Johnson 2017: 705–706). This scandal had particular racial and gendered codes, into which ideas of monstrosity were animated – firstly, through the presentation of CSE and grooming as a crime against whiteness; secondly, as a crime which emerged out of an inferior and deviant culture and underdeveloped sexuality. This relied on the resuscitation of colonial imaginaries of the dangerous brown man lusting after white women, but also the ‘backwards’ nature of Asian and particular Muslim family and communal structure, which was viewed as a causal factor underpinning sexual exploitation.

To appreciate the precise nature of how grooming became a monstrous crime is to understand the role that outrage and disgust play here. Outrage and disgust are particularly vital emotional states to study because of how they circulate and drive certain attachments of violence to particular bodies (how they make things ‘stick’). To Ahmed (2004: 11) it is vital that we appreciate how emotions stick and create attachments, and in doing so ‘create the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds’. Outrage and disgust at what happened in Rotherham can be seen to be mobilised by particular attachments to the ‘surfaces and boundaries’ of whiteness and white nationalism. Such attachments are only made possible through the way that perversity and deviancy are bound onto the body of racialised men

and wider racialised communities. Here the whitening and feminisation of the victims, the focus on childhood innocence, the darkening and pathologising of the perpetrators, the claims to white family, all become features which animated the particular bordering practice of deprivation.

The cultural politics of the white family

The far right in Britain has been particularly adept at seizing upon and mobilising the emotions of outrage and disgust around grooming. For instance, the white nationalist organisation the English Defence League (EDL) campaigned in many northern towns after 2011 under the mantra that authorities had failed to protect white girls from ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslim men’. Here ‘white girls’ were presented as forever under attack by ‘rapist foreigners’ whose attacks on white female bodies were viewed as part of an attack on ‘British’ and ‘European’ culture. This was often presented as a ‘rape jihad’ (EDL 2019).

Whilst the EDL may be an extreme and relatively small organisation, their position is significant because of how it makes explicit the attachment between whiteness and abuse, which is repeated more broadly. Despite the liberal authorities’ condemnation of the actions of the EDL and their position, more mainstream media outlets and state authorities have in many ways shared with the EDL a familiar analysis of grooming. The mobilisation of the far right in Rotherham has been linked to numerous attacks on the local Muslim population. This has led to at least one reported death, that of 81-year-old Mushin Ahmed (Mitchinson 2015). South Yorkshire Police have often been complicit in failing to protect the local Muslim population, not only by allowing far-right marches by organisations like the EDL to go ahead but also by arresting anti-racist protestors defending their local community (Wilson 2018).

Such racialised violence has been justified by the EDL as a form of ‘protection’ against ‘grooming gangs’ (akin to the ‘soldiers’ in Boby’s

account above). Speaking in Newcastle in 2016, one campaigner argued that:

I've seen the devastation in their eyes. And I look at them – and I try not to show pity. All of these girls who have suffered and are still suffering, they have brothers, they have sisters; they have mums, they have dads, they have aunties and uncles, grandparents; and a wider circle of friends who watch *their friends* decay and rot away into oblivion. (EDL 2016)

These sentiments alone appear to be concerned with the plight of vulnerable women and may seem initially unproblematic. However, this suffering, pity and decay are bound to national rot in the EDL's ideology – multiculturalism, political correctness, toleration of 'others' are all central to the emotions of 'decay' and 'suffering' attached to grooming. Rather than being concerned with violence done to women, this suffering is converted into the violence done to *whiteness*.

The emotional circulations around grooming are consistently bound to white nationalism and white femininity. It is significant that in this speech, 'rot' is witnessed and felt by or on the family. What is so central to the scandal of grooming is that these are *white girls* raped by *Asian men*. To Peter McLoughlin (2016), what is significant about 'grooming gangs' is that these perpetrators always come after 'our girls.' As Yuval-Davis (1997) has argued, feminised bodies constitute a symbolic and biological role in the reproduction of race and nationhood, and, as with colonial fears about 'miscegenation', remain pervasive sites of anxiety and control. Disgust over the rape of 'our girls' in such accounts is framed as a rape of white Britishness rather the violation of individual bodies. In this context the sexualised violence of grooming is also tied to anti-Muslim racism (such as in the articulation of 'rape jihad'). White women must be 'protected from Islam' for the continuity of 'us' and sustaining the purity of the white family and national home.

This is significant for how wider nationalistic atmospheres abounded after the events in Rotherham. In this context, violation is made 'feelable' (made disgusting and outrageous) through the signifier of the 'foreigner' and the terroristic penetration of the white (national) body. Violation

is translated into the experience of men who must protect the family as the nation. Feeding into the wider logics of colonial warfare in the War on Terror, the response to such threats is martial. The EDL, for instance, are in the habit of calling themselves ‘footsoldiers’ (EDL 2019).

Writing the (white) family

Feminised whiteness drives these explicit white nationalist projects (such as the EDL) through strategies that connect up with anti-Muslim racism that is central to the contemporary War on Terror. But what is more significant is how feminised whiteness also saturates the affective mood of disgust and outrage surrounding grooming more broadly, and how this happens in sites that are not explicitly linked to projects of white nationalism. Whilst most analysis of grooming has tended to explore dynamics in the mainstream media (Cockbain 2013; Tufail 2015), I now want to examine how (non-)fiction has played a role in building and dismantling emotional attachments around the ‘grooming scandal’. One product of the attention on grooming has been the publication of an expanding body of confessional books on the subject. Since 2010 thirteen novels concerning grooming have been published in the UK, as well as the release of one BAFTA award-winning television miniseries, *Three Girls* (Lowthorpe 2017). The rise of the confessional novel has a much older lineage (see Halberstam 1995) but we can view this as part of a cultural trend that emerged in the 1990s when books and television programmes on paedophilia began to dominate bookshelves and occupy schedules in both the UK and US. This reflected broader shifts, particularly in Anglo-American culture, where the ‘monstrous paedophile’ became a metaphor for the imagined threats to ‘family values’ posed by globalisation, immigration, demands for LGBT and minority rights and ‘excessive’ forms of consumer capitalism. The publications on grooming add a particularly racialised dimension to the existing figuration of the paedophile monster in works of (non-)fiction and, with it, shifting threats to the white nuclear family and childhood innocence.

The creation of this body of work is in and of itself a significant cultural development. It begs questions of the role of the confessional novel in neoliberal societies, as well as the political economy of publishing and programme commissioning. What is also significant is how cultural artefacts like this circulate affective moods (Closs Stephens 2016), through images but also through thick, personalised description in autobiographical accounts of rape – including sights, smells and sounds of deeply violent acts.⁵ They thus provide a site of ‘truth-telling’ that is arranged through both the production of an ‘authentic’ voice but equally an affective relationship between narrative and reader. They thus deserve our attention for what they tell us about the wider scandal of grooming.

What is striking about this body of literature is its close-knit consistency. After reading several of these books, the familiarity of the narrative becomes uncanny. Almost all of them mirror each other in tone, style, content, format and imagery. The majority function as autobiographical accounts (although a large proportion are ghost written), which makes the ‘personal’ experience of these narratives speak to a ‘deeper’ truth of the individualised confessional (Mills 1995). Despite how they are marketed as ‘autobiographical’, it remains important to approach these artefacts as sites of social narratives and as nodes in broader affective regimes. These books are commissioned, edited, made publishable within a particular economic and cultural domain where both sex and violence are commodified, made readable and profitable. To consider how affect functions in relation to these artefacts means exploring how sentiments and emotions circulate through this work to create particular types of attachments, boundaries and ‘surfaces’ (Ahmed 2004: 23–28). In asking how the violence is made thinkable and feelable, I am interested in how the books are aligned to particular ideological positions and how this produces emotive states and feelings towards ‘others’.

Innocence, whiteness and the child

What is, of course, politically significant is who is allowed to speak through these cultural artefacts – who they are speaking *to* and what

this *does*. The narrator in the majority of these books is depicted as a survivor of abuse. However, they speak from a position of both white feminised victimhood and also childhood innocence. Nearly every novel on the subject of grooming begins with detailed descriptions of the domesticity of the patriarchal family home. We are then introduced to the maturing of their body and sexual relationships through school, before the eventual encounter with abuse. This is always enabled through the presence or development of a relationship with a boy or man of colour. In most cases the author lingers on the 'Asianess' of this figure, which equally works to embolden the whiteness of the home and domestic space of protection the author emerges from. Significantly, even if this initial relationship is not abusive, it is often narrated as the facilitation of abuse. Thus, as a genre these books relay a particular failed heteronormative temporality attached to the white family. It is in life beyond the parameters of the paternal home that deviancy begins (whilst in fact most abuse takes place *within* the family home). It is the danger of both emergent female sexuality and interracial intimacy that leads (logically) to abuse.

The enlisting of the voice of the 'child' is a tactic of this genre which produces outrage through the 'loss of innocence'. But it is worth exploring the racialised and gendered codes of both 'childhood' and 'victimhood' because they relate to how grooming is made intelligible. One of the many striking things about this genre are the front covers, which set up and bolster the already assumed positionality and bodied character of the narrator. Of the thirteen UK novels on grooming available through Amazon.co.uk, all are covered with an image of a young white woman or girl. The bodied placement of the cover image is important: some are of very young girls who would be socially known as 'children', others rely on more heavily sexualised images of young women, often with skin exposed, wearing full make up, staring into the camera, often with doe-like blue eyes. Not a single cover references a woman of colour (we should remember that some things are not feelable in the same way; some things do not stick). This vision of white innocence is then immediately juxtaposed with the title of the book, which bolsters the

immanence of violence. Such titles include *Violated, Exploited, Broken and Betrayed* and *Girl for Sale*.⁶

The authority of the narrative of abuse is thus made feelable through the affect dynamic of whiteness, which joins together ‘white girls’, ‘innocence’ and ‘violation’. Abuse here is made recognisable through the fragility of the body of the ‘white child’ who, as Lee Edelman (2004) argues, is always cast as the defining symbol of ‘reproductive futurism’ and ‘social hope’. But this white childhood also works as a frame for the sexualised male gaze. Take, for example, the autobiographical book by Emma Jackson. In 2010 her account of sexual abuse was published as *The End of My World*. The front cover depicted a young girl of around 10 years of age with her head in her hands. In 2012, as grooming was firmly placed in the public eye, the book was republished as *Exploited*. The new cover featured a soft-focus shot of a (partially) naked blonde adolescent, staring into the camera with dewy blue eyes. The framing of such images plays an important part in the politics of grooming. Not only does the violent sexualisation of the cover relate to the sensationalism of grooming (‘exploited!’), but it also works to equate sexual exploitation and rape, firstly with dangerous female sexuality (the more sensuous and nude position of the young women) and then with the penetration of purity, white, blonde femininity, by men of colour. Violence becomes recognisable and feelable as the body of the white girl is again made both risky and threatened.⁷

This construction invites the reader to adopt an emotional attachment to the young, feminised body in a way that relays rage and disgust towards the perverse other. This joins up with the broader logics of grooming scandals propagated by elites. For example, MP Jack Straw argued in 2011 that what drove Asian men to rape white girls was that they were ‘fizzing and popping with testosterone’ (BBC 2011). Here rape is presented as an *outcome* of Asian communities’ underdeveloped sexuality and kinship, where they are held back by arranged marriage and sexual conservatism (and the unavailability of their ‘own’ women). But it also renders rape and abuse a product of *lust* and unvanquished aberrant desire rather than an act of violence and power.

Through these cultural artefacts, outrage and disgust are bolstered as affective moods which solidify attachments to the white nation and bind violence to other 'perverse' bodies. Readers are addressed to share in the experience of threatened white innocence (embodied in the figure of the 'pure' child and the sexualised adolescent). This becomes clear in the formatted ending of each book where, without fail, the author sets their story in the wider context of grooming and racial politics in the UK. Their experience is then rendered a 'truth' of the dangerous masculinity of brown men.

Whilst every novel pays lip service to an anti-racist stance, this is then logically denied by an assessment of the cultural motivations of the perpetrators. For example, in *Girl for Sale* (2015) the cause of abuse is the misogyny of Asian men who have no respect for women. In *Stolen Girl* (2013) the issue is the availability of white girls for Asian men and the heightened danger is that they can disappear to Pakistan at the drop of a hat. In *Violated* (2015), abuse and eventually murder are rendered products of a culture of honour attached to Islam. The authors approach these explanations as if they are self-evident truths. Here misogyny and hate of white women is located culturally; it is of 'Asian' and 'Muslim' communities, tied to religion, hyperpatriarchy, diasporic practices (just as with forced marriage). The borders of the white nation are brought to life here in an uncanny mirror to the mobilising energies of the far right, which again is conditioned by claims to the white family central to the organisation of the British Empire.

In describing acts of abuse and sexual violence, these narratives are almost always coded through epidemiological senses of race (Fanon 1986). In one passage in *Violated* (Wilson 2015: 266) the victim walks through a 'predominantly Asian area' of a city and is physically sick at the smell of the environment. Another describes the stench of curry on the breath of her attacker and the way that perpetrators would speak in Urdu or Punjabi. It is here that disgust becomes an entangled affect regime. It is impossible to separate the racial demarcations of the perpetrators body and wider cultural environment, and wider Asian and Muslim community, from the act of abuse (on the politics of disgust

see Ahmed 2004: 82–100). Throughout these novels, sexual violence is not only rendered otherwise (it is of ‘Pakistan’, ‘West Africa’, the ‘Wild West’) but also specifically inhuman. Perpetrators are frequently ‘hunters’ or ‘lions of the Savannah’ who come to stalk their prey (Anonymous (Girl A) 2013: 329). They are beasts who live on white flesh. As with other energising forms of coloniality, animalism is again the crossing of the monstrous into the human world.

‘White girls’

What makes whiteness such an accomplice in the translation of criminals into monsters, and such a significant part of the story of grooming more broadly is its flexibility. What we witness in strategies which ‘make sense’ of grooming and sexual abuse (such as the artefacts above) is the transformation of victims into ‘white girls’. This first involves a social and institutional silencing and forgetting of abuse ‘within’ communities and against women of colour (Thiara *et al.* 2015). Despite convincing evidence to the contrary (Gohir 2013), grooming is only rendered meaningful and feelable as an interracial crime which is done by ‘Asian men’ on ‘white women’ or ‘girls’ (also see Apna Haq 2018; Wilson 2018). Unlike sham or forced marriage, sexual abuse and grooming do not stick to women of colour. Secondly, this process of victimisation involves the whitening of vulnerable children from a multitude of social backgrounds.

Reports have detailed the extent of institutional failures of multiple social agencies in Rotherham and other towns where young girls and boys reported sexual abuse and rape for up to fifteen years, with little or no action from authorities (see, for example, Jay 2014; Casey 2015). Official reports on institutional failures in Rotherham consistently showed that most of the girls who suffered sexual abuse were known to the police and frequently dismissed as petty criminals, ‘child prostitutes’ or ‘little whores’ (Jay 2014: 69, 112; Casey 2015: 34–35, 47). It has also been revealed that during those fifteen years, 67.5 per cent of perpetrators of CSE in Yorkshire were white (Drew 2016). Most of the young people

who were victims of CSE were already marginalised and vulnerable, in care and predominantly from poor communities. This reminds us that whiteness is flexible. It is bodied. But it must be worked upon and crafted. These young people were not always ‘white girls’.

White heteronormative power works by privileging able-bodied, heterosexual, bourgeois white men. For these girls to eventually speak, be heard and have their stories recognised, they had to be discovered to be ‘white’. And they could only be discovered to be white through the monstrous racial crime threat of grooming. By this, I mean that they could only be translated as white once they were established within the sexualised and racialised grammar of the protection of the white national family (as daughters, sisters, wives, etc. in need of protection). The ‘whitening’ of these girls and the frame through which ‘their’ story is told is saturated in whiteness because that was the only way it could become intelligible and listenable within wider codes of coloniality (i.e. as a wider threat to the white body, white family, white nation, white civilisation). The discovery of monstrosity involved a translation of ‘child prostitutes’ into daughters of the white familial nation. At the same time, this eviscerated the voices of other women and girls (as well as men and boys) who were subject to abuse but who did not fit within this structuring of monstrous intimacies.

Conclusion

Defending Theresa May’s decision to strip naturalised citizens and dual nationals convicted of sexual exploitation or grooming of their citizenship, a Whitehall legal adviser argued: ‘There are no limits. It is not just potential terrorists who face losing their UK citizenship. Those involved in serious or organised crime, and who hold dual nationality, can expect similar justice’ (quoted in Cusick 2016). In the context of the racialised logic of grooming scandals and the anti-Muslim racism we see in the War on Terror, ‘there are no limits’ must be read as a specific threat against those whose citizenship is already brought into question as ‘suspect’

populations. As we have seen, even when white British citizens fight for Kurdish ‘terrorist’ groups in Syria they are shielded from the deprivation of citizenship. The bordering practice of deprivation, which destroys the settled rights of citizenship and can lead to deportation, ‘sticks’ to certain bodies and slides off others.

The stripping of rights of those convicted of CSE was justified by the exceptional ‘monstrousness’ of these acts. But what is significant here is how, just as with terrorism or forced marriage, grooming and sexual abuse stick to ‘Asian’ and ‘Muslim’ bodies as serious and exceptional crimes. It is not only the crime of CSE that makes deprivation of citizenship necessary and even celebrated (as in some parts of the media) but this relies upon the existing perceived deviancy of racialised populations who are already cast as unfamiliar. To add to this, the case of grooming not only relied upon colonial ideas of deviancy (as we saw in the last chapter) but it is made sense of through the threat that racialised populations pose to ‘proper’, white, British family.

That the deprivation of citizenship is energised by the monstrousness of grooming reminds us of how interracial intimacy has remained a site of both extreme and normalised colonial violence. This violence, energised by racialised sexuality, has taken the form of lynch mobs claiming to defend white women against black rapists, explicit bans on interracial marriage and ‘miscegenation’ laws across the British Empire, anti-Muslim attacks, beatings and murders in the wake of grooming scandals. Particular imperial codes of the white European family have been used to justify white terror (Razack *et al.* 2010; Richter-Montpetit 2014) – think, for instance, of Eyre’s justification for the massacre of black protestors in Morant Bay. Authorities harness and draw upon such racial violence to govern colonised populations. As I have argued, appeals to family continue to animate colonial bordering in Britain today. This means that borders can stick to certain people, even if they have citizenship – to remove their rights, to deport them, to line them up in the sights of an RAF drone. In analysing the role of ‘family’ in such bordering moves, we can appreciate how ‘family’ plays an ongoing role in practices of *dispossession*. Defending the white family involves

marshalling particular forms of 'legitimate' – that is, state-sanctioned – racial violence.

Grooming, I have illustrated, is made monstrous through the feelability of this violence, which is again made possible through a distribution of 'racist sentiment' (Hook 2005: 74). This violence can only be made sense of as *worse* than other forms of sexual abuse and rape (i.e. those carried out by white criminals) through the exceptionalism of interracial sexual violence as a threat to whiteness. This not only obscures violence and abuse done to women of colour (see Imkaan 2019) but obscures other structural conditions which made grooming possible such as deregulation, night-time economies, wider forms of patriarchy. As with forced marriage, this merely recycles a racist and culturalist analysis. The valorisation of whiteness, in the aid of white nationalism, creates the double bind of forgetting the everyday violence that affects many women of colour (Thiara *et al.* 2015), whilst equally readapting colonial racialised masculinity and claims of the undomesticated family to make new forms of legitimate violence possible.

Set in these terms, deprivation of citizenship works as a particular form of exceptional punishment. It is about securing the white family from the terror of the racialised monster through enacting the violence of deprivation. Here borders mark out and distinguish people as deviant and monstrous. The demarcation of the monster meets up with the sovereign power of the state to deprive a subject of their supposedly settled rights. This is the work of the sovereign border; because the border is sticky it follows and sticks to certain people as a tool of racialised governance. Against the many assumptions regarding borders as a tool of immigration, sticky borders are shown to stick to citizens as well as migrants. The violence of this move to dispossess is normalised and hidden because it is cast (through the logics of white nationalism) as a common-sense defence of the white family. White subjects who commit similar crimes, who travel to war zones to fight, are not stripped of their citizenship because they are not racialised as 'out of place' – they *belong*, even when committing violence.

This chapter has traced how borders stick to certain bodies, animated as this is by shifting modes of racialised sexuality. Here appeals to the white (often national) family work to constitute certain forms of violence as exceptional and monstrous. Some violence is thinkable and feelable in ways that create familial attachments – such as the ‘daughters of the nation’. Such attachments I have shown both silence and but also generate other forms of violence. We are reminded of how ‘family’ is not only related to processes of control within colonial domestication but also dispossession. In this way, it is important to not examine the case of grooming in isolation but to probe at what this tells us about the character of borders and citizenship in postcolonial Britain more broadly – where borders go and what they do to apparently settled rights. This demands a broader analysis of the deprivation of citizenship, which I turn to in the next chapter.

Notes

- 1 In terms of method in this chapter, I largely drew upon Sara Ahmed’s work on affect to trace the emotional circulations that different discursive utterances, images and narratives bring together and manifest. Affect is about the coalescing of emotions, moods, atmospheres, senses which are always embodied but that can be shaped by interaction with discursive and textual objects (novels, documents, images, etc.) (Ahmed 2004: 13–14). To Ahmed (2004), emotions circulate and emerge (and can be fostered) in a way that brings certain points of contact together. Using this approach, I studied thirteen novels on the subject of grooming published between 2011 and 2018 to examine what emotional impulses they shaped and directed around the racial dynamics of grooming. Here I employed discourse analysis to understand the grammar and logic of these narratives and how they connected to wider social grammars around grooming, paying attention to the way emotions are brought up and used. To map this out further, I paid attention to how I felt and the emotions stirred in me whilst reading these novels, and also examined how the novels had been reviewed by readers and linked into broader debates about grooming – for example by right-wing organisations. This involved tracing the emotional politics of whiteness and grooming.
- 2 Particularly the ‘spread’ of American ‘black gang culture’ into the UK through hip-hop music, but also localised genres such as garage, drill and so on.

- 3 Black and Asian people make up 26 per cent of the prison population in England and Wales but only represent 13 per cent of the general population (Sturge 2018: 4).
- 4 *Easy Meat* is published by English Review Press, a subsidiary of the World Encounter Institute, which works to propagate a project of white supremacy through a blog series and book press. It does so through claims to protect 'Western civilisation', which is often limited to just 'English-speaking democracies.' As with much of the new right, this project claims to 'speak truth to power' through protecting 'freedom of speech' and this is used to justify a clearly Islamophobic agenda. See the mission statement here: www.newenglishreview.org/World_Encounter_Institute/ (accessed 23 July 2018).
- 5 It may seem (as it did to me) an unattractive prospect to critically analyse the personal experience and trauma of victims of abuse through such novels. But these accounts remain a vital site in the animation of coloniality for reasons that will hopefully become clear. These texts are also brought together as part of the economies of grooming. Whilst dubbed as 'confessional' and 'autobiographical' accounts, we should remember that they are not spontaneous outpourings of trauma but are commissioned by publishers and editors as part of an industry of voyeurism that circulates and moulds such moral panics.
- 6 In what might be a nod at dark irony, the font and format of the books mirror that of popular teen fiction such as *The Baby-Sitters Club*.
- 7 The covers of the books can be seen on the Penguin website – *The End of My World*: www.penguin.co.uk/books/1083666/the-end-of-my-world/9780091930523.html; *Exploited*: www.penguin.co.uk/books/109/1095140/exploited/9780091950460.html (both accessed 31 July 2019).