British Indian Seafarers, Bordering and Belonging
Georgie Wemyss
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2095-1407

Abstract
This chapter draws from critical whiteness and critical border studies to explore historical practices of bordering that link British imperial maritime and immigration legislation with the racialized 'common sense' of the UK's twenty-first century hostile environment immigration regime. It brings together recent work on 'everyday bordering' (Wemyss, 2015, Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy, 2019) with investigations into the relationship between whiteness and racialized hierarchies of citizenship and belonging. It focuses on the experiences of British Indian seafarers forced into the racialized labour category of 'lascar' through maritime legislation. In being categorized as 'lascars', British Indian men embodied borders established to keep British settler colonies and the imperial metropole ideologically and materially white. The chapter evidences immigration legislation from across the empire that included racist state bordering processes that targeted working class Indian men, leading to their invisibility in dominant narratives of citizenship and belonging. It shows how, in the context of global coloniality, their descendants continue to experience state bordering regimes that compel them as citizens to be border-guards in their roles of employers, landlords or health workers, at the same time as targeting them as probable illegal border-crossers because, using Nayak's (2007) expression, they are 'not quite white enough'.

Introduction

> 'It is creating divisions in the society. Not only between the white indigenous people
> and the immigrant people. It could just be one of my friends who has fallen out with
> me ... just to harass me … so the Home Office are trying their best not to make a
> cohesive society although they preach for this … they are trying to employ people as
> police against each other they are creating a situation of chaos in this society'
> (Ahmed, British-Bangladeshi small business employer, London).[i]

Ahmed is talking about increased immigration enforcement raids on British-Bangladeshi owned businesses happening as ordinary citizens were encouraged to report their suspicions of people living or working 'illegally' in the UK as part of creating a 'hostile environment' for UK immigration. He warned against the divisive impacts of this on British society whereby individuals acting as citizen border-guards are able to use their insider status to exclude and disrupt the lives of others. Through everyday bordering processes (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy, 2018), all citizens, including those who feel othered in

their daily interactions, are encouraged to bolster their insider status by sustaining national borders through policing the lives of neighbours. This happens as part of the broader state induced compulsions to monitor the immigration status of their neighbours, tenants or employees. Old scores with no obvious connection to immigration, 'race' or religion can be reignited when those confident in their legal status as citizens are enabled to use state immigration laws to harass those whom they perceive as less secure.

This chapter draws on theoretical approaches developed within critical race studies that understand whiteness as a social and cultural construction that is differentially and conditionally associated with skin colour. Whilst whiteness shifts over time and in different spaces, it has evolved as an organizing principle of late modernity. It is linked to hierarchies of privilege and belonging and enacted through ideas of nation and formal and informal immigration status upheld in social policies (Hage, 1998; Wemyss, 2006; Nayak, 2007; Hunter et al., 2010). Through the everyday actions of citizens encouraged or compelled to monitor immigration status of their neighbours, tenants or employees the twenty-first century hostile environment immigration policies that Ahmed is talking about codify whiteness, enacting racialized power, grown out of British colonial expansion and destruction. All citizens are legally obliged to carry out everyday bordering duties (Yuval-Davis et al., 2019) via job application processes, health and other public and private service access monitoring. However, their targets are those thought of, using Nayak's expression (2007) as 'not white enough' to be included in the cultural construct of white Britishness. Successful business owners such as Ahmed may abide by the rules of the neoliberal cultures of whiteness in their daily lives by checking the immigration status of their employees. However, they are 'not white enough' to avoid rumour-triggered Border Force raids of their businesses or for their immigration status to not be questioned by bureaucrats who cannot imagine them as British citizens. For them whiteness and hence their status as British nationals is provisional.

Like many other British-Bangladeshis, Ahmed had been born in the district of Sylhet[ii] and settled in London with his wife whose extended family members had migrated to the UK over different decades and generations. Their ancestors had included men employed on British merchant navy ships in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries - some of whom had

settled in Britain whilst others built lives in port cities or inland across the British Empire and the US or had returned to live in Sylhet (Adams, 1987; Goodall, 2008; Bald, 2013).

Ahmed's comment, identifying the apparently contradictory rhetoric and practice of the UK government, illustrates the perspectives of British citizens whose ancestors were born in the ex-Empire and for whom the borders of Britain have rarely appeared 'natural', one dimensional or 'fair'. Neither did they experience borders as the impermeable linear constructions along the edges of state territories of nationalist discourses. In particular, the globally mobile, racialized colonial seafaring labour force were a motivation for the codification of white privilege into maritime and immigration laws that created and re-created state borders and ideologies of white nationhood across the British Empire. Seafarers also experienced the permeability and shifting characteristics of racialized legal employment categories and the conditionality of whiteness in maritime and imperial contexts. During wartime crises a minority of British Indian seafarers managed to be recruited into white labour categories at sea whilst continuing to be targets of racist violence and discrimination on and offshore (Visram, 2002).

In the following discussion, I use an analytical approach drawn from theories of global coloniality and critical whiteness studies (Hunter et al., 2010) to focus on selected histories of the colonial British Indian maritime labour force in order to expand understandings of different ways that white supremacy has framed and continues to form present-day state bordering practices that are part of hostile environment immigration policies that force citizens racialized as 'not white enough' to prove their right to live and work in the UK. Maritime labour histories evidence how colonial employment categories and other bordering discourses and immigration practices worked together over four centuries to produce enduring ideas of 'who is white' and who is 'not white enough' strengthening the relationship between whiteness and Britishness. Tlostanova and Mignolo explain global coloniality as the 'model of power relations that came into existence as a consequence of the Western imperial expansion but did not end with the official end of colonialism and colonial administrations' (2012:7). Whilst historical European colonialism is (mostly) past, the relations of coloniality endure. The power relations of global coloniality include historical cultural and labour relations together with knowledge production that

both enables and restricts the ways differently situated people imagine their position in the world and their relationships with others.   In the following sections I begin by briefly outlining how processes of bordering work to include and exclude differently situated people in the context of global coloniality. I then focus on how racialized hierarchies of Britishness and belonging have produced and been reproduced through historical maritime and immigration bordering legislation that created mobile labour categories that aimed to prevent British Indian subjects from settling in the UK and white settler colonies.

Bordering, global coloniality and exclusionary categories.

Far from the natural barriers or solid constructions of nationalist imaginations, state borders have always been created, re-constructed and experienced in diverse ways, by differently situated people, at multiple levels and sites across time and space (Yuval-Davis et al., 2019). Borders act as filters - permeable for those permitted to or who manage to cross them - whilst they are intended to be impermeable to others. Bordering processes constitute a principal organising mechanism in constructing, maintaining, and controlling social and political order from local to global scales. Van Houtum, Kramsch and Zierhofen's (2005) notion of 'b/ordering' – the interaction between the ordering of chaos and processes of border-making - succinctly encapsulates the relationship between bordering and governance whereby b/ordering discourses and practices create and recreate categories of those who are included and those who are excluded from national collectivities. Processes of bordering always differentiate between 'us' and 'them', those who are in and those who are out, those who are allowed to cross the borders and those who are not. Different political projects of belonging construct the borders as differentially permeable, view those who want to cross the border as more or less of a security or cultural threat and construct the borders around different criteria for participation and entitlement for those who do cross them (Yuval-Davis et al., 2019). 'Everyday bordering', which in this section I use to discuss contemporary hostile environment immigration policies, refers to the everyday construction of *state* borders through ideology, cultural mediation, discourses, political institutions, attitudes and everyday forms of transnationalism (Yuval-Davis et al., 2018). In the UK, discourses and practices of everyday bordering materially and culturally reproduce the relationship between whiteness and imagined Britishness and as such are enduring components of global coloniality.

Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century, governments in the Global South and North have been visibly strengthening state borders that were commonly created through European wars and colonial treaties. External walls or fences are constructed in parallel with increasing border checks at internal sites. Whilst neoliberal globalisation has been associated with de-bordering for goods, financial service and global elites, it has also been accompanied by re-bordering inside and outside of state territories in the name of securitisation. For example, in Israel the concrete wall built in 2000, aimed at preventing terrorist attacks, also cut off Palestinians from fields and work in Palestinian West Bank territory. The steel wall along the Eqyptian border and Sinai desert that was built a decade later to stop African migrants fleeing war and poverty was later used to stop ISIS attacks (ibid:60).

As borders have moved into the centre of political and social life, processes of everyday bordering are redefining contemporary notions of citizenship and belonging for racialized minorities and for hegemonic majorities. In India, as well as the construction of fences to keep out Muslim Pakistani and Bangladeshi citizens, the world's most extensive biometric ID system extends the reach of the internal border. It monitors all Indian citizens whilst excluding from welfare services and pensions those, predominantly Muslims, labelled as Pakistanis, Bangladeshis or from Myanmar, who cannot prove to bureaucrats that they are legal residents (Manhotra, 2016). The internal bordering thus intensified the socio-economic inequalities and rigid hierarchies of belonging which were legacies of the partition of British-ruled India.

Immigration and nationality legislation have worked in bordering and racially ordering European nations over centuries of colonial expansion. Successive laws have created and policed borders that maintain a global racialized order established by colonisation. In the case of the UK, Nadine El-Enany (2020) has mapped out how past and present legislation relating to Britain and its colonies have resulted in wealth accumulated globally being located within the borders of the United Kingdom. Immigration legislation has ensured that assets in the form of infrastructure, welfare provision and future opportunities for citizens are inaccessible to most descendants of Britain's colonial subjects. In different times and colonial spaces, intentionally discriminatory legislation has been made to appear 'race-neutral' (El-Enany, 2020). Post-independence, bordering technologies such as those

that constitute the hostile environment, maintain a permeability in state borders for the citizens of Britain's white settler colonies whilst blocking citizens of Britain's African, Asian and Caribbean colonies.

For post-imperial Britain, the relationship between whiteness and Britishness ensures that the spectacular bordering of immigration raids (de Genova, 2012), the bordering of the 'culture of disbelief' - a starting point of extreme scepticism - that imbues Home Office bureaucrats in their interactions with those with family connections in the Global South, and the everyday bordering of hostile environment policies work together to construct racialized hierarchies of belonging, producing and re-producing ideas of who belongs or does not belong; who is white or not white enough to belong. In the UK the 'Windrush scandal', created through the structural racialized violence of colonial bordering and postcolonial re-bordering processes, exemplifies the historical relationships between whiteness, governance, bordering and belonging. The scandal is the most widely publicised consequence of UK hostile environment immigration policies embedded in the 2014 and 2016 Immigration Acts whereby regulations require employers, landlords and healthcare workers to carry out unpaid, untrained border-guarding roles on behalf of the British state (Yuval Davis et al., 2019). As everyday border-guards, private citizens and public sector administrators denied employment, homes and healthcare to working class Black British citizens, most usually the children of British subjects who had moved from Caribbean colonies to the British mainland to work. Many of the 'Windrush generation' had arrived in the UK with their right to residence recorded on their parents' passports whilst others born in the UK had no documentary evidence to prove their citizenship. Individuals who could not prove their UK citizenship to citizen border-guards lost their livelihoods, many were detained, deported and died before they received any state compensation (Gentleman, 2019). The everyday bordering of the hostile environment legislation impacted beyond those of the Windrush generation. It led to discrimination in letting property to, or in employing British citizens and other legal residents deemed 'not white enough'. In addition, British employers in the so called 'ethnic enclave economy', including Ahmed, faced targeted Border Force raids based on suspicions that they employed compatriots illegally or because their neighbours bore a grudge (Bloch et al, 2015; Grant and Peel, 2015: Wemyss, 2015; Yuval-Davis et al, 2018).

The Windrush scandal exposed, momentarily, the exclusionary relationship between whiteness and Britishness. As the scandal progressed, the centrality of the enslavement of Africans and plantation economies to white Briton's wealth and British power and the related experiences of detention and deportation of Black British citizens were voiced in Parliament (Lammy, 2018) and the Home Office commissioned a report that raised the need for staff to be educated in British Empire histories[iii] (Williams, 2020). The scandal demonstrated that to understand how contemporary immigration regimes and bordering practices reproduce notions of white Britishness and belonging it is essential to understand their colonial genealogies. In the following section, I focus on these relations of global coloniality as they inscribe the lives of descendants of British Indian seafarers. Four hundred years of colonialism rarely frames dominant media or political narratives about Britain's past and the specific histories of working class south Asian seafarers are typically absent. Present, though, are the impacts of colonial-era maritime legislation that racialized Indian British seafarers as not white and hence their British descendants as not white or not white enough. Like nineteenth century seafarers, they have come to embody the border becoming identified as suspected illegal border crossers and the targets of hostile environment policies. I show how selected historical material practices of state bordering have worked together over centuries to reproduce notions of white Britishness that sought to prevent British Indian seafarers from settling in the UK and continues to exclude their descendants from British citizenship and belonging.

British Indian seafarers: bordering at sea and onshore

Since the seventeenth century, immigration control through maritime legislation, immigration law and partnerships between state and private actors has, in specific times and spaces, been constructed to exclude Indian colonial subjects from settling in the UK, South Africa, Canada, Australia and elsewhere. In this section I consider selected examples of bordering that has impacted on the lives, including feelings of belonging and experiences of citizenship, of present-day racialized citizens of Britain and white settler colonies of its ex-Empire.

The historian Ravi Ahuja (2006) has demonstrated, the tension between the 'mobility' and 'containment' of British Indian subjects during a period of expanding mobility in the later decades of the British Empire. Following the abolition of slavery, Indian indentured labourers were transported to work in plantations in Fiji, Mauritius, South Africa and the Caribbean and later labourers travelled to work on the railways in East Africa where many settled. In the First and Second World Wars, Indian soldiers were transported to fight, and many died in the Middle East, Europe and South East Asia. Most mobile of all were the Indian seafarers who worked on the ships delivering the labourers, military and goods throughout the period of empire and global conflict. Gopalan Balachandran characterises the metropolitan response to the increased mobility from Asia as reinforcing 'tiered arrangements of racialized biopolitical borders' reaching into ships and foreign ports' (2016:188). Bordering technologies constructed to 'contain' the Indian mobile labour force and prevent desertions and the settlement of working-class Indian men in the metropolis and white settler colonies mean that there is little material or discursive evidence of their time on land. However, as I show below, whilst dominant empire discourses represented white Europeans as imposing racialized order on migrations to their colonies, the borders were permeable and 'containment' never complete.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a complex array of bordering techniques grew out of the economic priorities of shipping companies that strove to keep costs down through maintaining a segmented, racialized labour market with Indian seafarers kept at the bottom of a rigid hierarchy (Ahuja, 2006; Tabili, 1994; Visram, 2002). These combined with bordering processes associated with racially exclusive immigration laws in Britain, North America and Australia so that at different times and in different spaces, multiple state and privately administered bordering techniques were put in place attempting to 'contain' the itinerant seafarers at ports of departure in India, at sea and at ports of entry. Below I explore these sites of bordering to show how they worked together to ensure that working class Indian seafarers faced considerable barriers in settling in Britain or the white settler colonies thereby producing their invisibility in national narratives and maintaining the dominant idea of the British nation as historically white.

Maritime bordering legislation

Successive British maritime legislation created a mobile racialized category of people that was excluded from permanent settlement in the UK and white settler colonies through requiring private ship owners and others to manage their exclusion via a range of bordering practices. From the early days of the East India Company, maritime legislation codified whiteness materially and culturally, enshrining interconnected racial and class discrimination in law, so that south Asian seafarers from rural colonial peripheries were recruited under Indian Articles which, at different times, stipulated lower rates of pay, less cabin space and lower quality food than their European counterparts (Balachandran, 2012; Visram, 2002). The 1823 Merchant Shipping Act, not repealed until 1963, extended earlier restrictions on Indian seafarers by confirming that Indian Articled Seafarers could only be paid off and discharged in India. The 1823 Act made official the racialized category of 'lascar', that had been commonly used to label men from south Asia or parts of Africa employed on European commanded ships. Seafarers from very diverse parts of the Indian subcontinent and some from parts of Africa were grouped into a single racialized category, employed on what became known as 'lascar' articles, compelling them to work in inferior conditions for less pay. 'Laskar' or 'lascar', became a term of racist abuse in the English language, described as the mobile equivalent of 'coolie' [iv] (Balachandran, 2012). Because Indian Articled seafarers were prohibited from terminating their contracts anywhere outside of British India, between voyages the East India Company was obliged to house them in barracks near the ports or in privately run boarding houses. In the days of sail seafarers would spend several months in the port areas before obtaining a return voyage and many became destitute and 'illegal' on the streets of London (Visram, 2002).

From the 1870s, following the introduction of steamships and the opening of the Suez Canal, greater numbers of Indian seafarers were employed working as firemen, stoking coal in the ships' engines. Steamships spent less time in dock than sailing vessels and British Indian crew were not always allowed to land. For those who did, the 1894 Merchant Shipping Act bound them to return to India by giving ship owners powers to place them on vessels heading back to India even without work. Indian seafarers who deserted faced criminal prosecution. (Balachandran, 2012; Fisher, 2004; Visram, 2002). Balachandran has likened ships to 'camps' - spaces of confinement and exception where states and private employers exercise

'extraordinary power' (2016:188). Up to the mid- twentieth century employers could insert a clause in 'lascar' contracts that prohibited men from taking any shore leave in European-ruled African and North American ports. The financial interests of the shipping companies were protected through the maritime laws which supported them in retaining a cheap labour force with seafarers employed on Indian Articles preferred to those employed on British contracts, because of the low costs of employment via the 'lascar' Articles and the stereotypes of the formers supposed 'docility' and compliance as opposed to the latter's 'drunkenness and absence without leave' (Ahuja, 2006; Visram, 2002). Constructions of the 'docility' of 'lascars' were produced through the racialized political and economic relations of domination on ship and on land where the ships officers wielded control over every aspect of their lives.

What was referred to in shipping company and government discourses as 'desertion' or 'jumping ship' was, apart from suicide, the only escape from the all-encompassing control of the shipping companies[v]. It involved Indian seafarers outwitting officers as they sought to cross the border illegally from ship to land. During war and post-war decades, they were actively recruited and employed illegally by onshore businesses. From the mid–1920s, despite the extension of maritime laws that required shipping companies to track down and prosecute British Indian 'deserters', only P&O did so because their trade, predominantly with Asia, depended to a greater extent on the low-waged 'lascar' Articled labour force. Other companies with more North Atlantic trade ignored desertions if it suited them economically (Balachandran, 2012: 181–4). By the 1930s desertion was spoken of by UK officials as a recognised means by which British Indian subjects could reach and settle in Britain (Visram, 2002: 259–63).

Many men successfully escaped the ships and 'lascar' Articles, using growing Indian networks in port cities to find work on land and ways to get employed back onto ships on British contracts giving them the better conditions of the European crew (Ahuja, 2006; Balachandran, 2012; Visram, 2002). The many names of Muslim seafarers on British Articles who died in the First and Second World Wars listed alongside European names on the Merchant Seafarers' Memorial next to the Tower of London evidence that British Indian men had been able to be re-employed on British Articles in wartime. The names of thousands of men who died when employed on inferior 'lascar' Articles are not moulded into the bronze

plaques. Deceased men from both categories are mostly invisible in post-war narratives, consolidating the idea of the whiteness of the British nation. Sona Miah, from Sylhet, survived the 1939-45 war. Like others he was able to escape following multiple voyages on Indian Articles and after working informally in London was recruited on British Articles as the Second World War began:

> Coming to Glasgow 1937, I ran away from *Arcade* ship, to London. Other people telling, London very good … I came to a house near New Road … 1939 - I got English Articles… good money … I sent it to my brother [in Sylhet] …Wartime … five different ships … after the war I worked on 22 different ships … 1954 to 1967 (Adams, 1986:137-8).

Another Sylheti seafarer, Nawab Ali, recounted how after jumping ship illegally in Cardiff at the beginning of the same war, he was hidden by a friend before he was also 'brought' to London where he was later able to obtain documents that enabled him to work legally and later helped many other men to leave ships then to find jobs onshore or take them to the Shipping Office to be recruited on British Articles. He also took that route, working under British Articles until the end of the war after which he lived in the UK (Adams, 1986: 70-89). Miah and Ali's experiences illustrate that the codification of whiteness into maritime legislation did not ensure the impermeability of the UK border to British Indian working-class men who left ships and shifted employment categories. However, through making it illegal to leave their ships, compelling them to hide and initially to live and work without documentation, the bordering legislation forced them to make themselves invisible to officials, further consolidating the idea of Britain as white.

Immigration Legislation in the UK and white settler colonies

Similar processes enacted through immigration legislation produced and maintained the material and cultural whiteness of the metropole and settler colonies. Immigration policies targeted at preventing Indian seafarers from settling and subsequently acquiring citizenship in the UK and white settler colonies combined with the maritime legislation to make it harder for working class British Indians to cross borders into the metropole or

elsewhere. By 1855 all British merchant shipping companies were employing 12,000 men on 'lascar' Articles. By the end of the nineteenth century, most employees of the P&O Company were British Indian (Goodall et al., 2008). In 1897, the Immigration Restriction Act was imposed in the port of Durban in the British settler colony of Natal. As well as limiting the entrance of the categories of 'paupers' and 'criminals', it introduced a literacy test aimed at preserving the whiteness of the colony by keeping out Indians, including seafarers, intending to land. The Act required potential migrants to write a letter to the Colonial Secretary in any European Language chosen by the official - who could therefore ensure that English was not selected if the potential unwanted border-crosser spoke English. Seafarers circumvented the barriers constructed by this contrived 'race-neutral' legal route, by deserting and disappearing into the Durban Indian community. They sometimes entered official records if they were caught, imprisoned and/or put on board departing ships (Hyslop, no date) all contributing to the construction of the colony as a space of white cultural and material domination. In 1902 the colonial Australian Ministry introduced a policy aimed at 'preserving the purity of their race and to encourage the recruitment of British seamen' that would only contract P&O Company mail steamers if they did not employ 'lascar' crew. To assuage Australian fears, officials in British India offered to confine the Indian crews to the ships when they docked in Australia (Balachandran, 2016:197). However, the combination of maritime legislation combined with immigration policies may not have kept the rate of desertions of Indians from British Merchant ships at Australian ports as low as archival records suggest. As in Natal, Imperial records were themselves part of the 'mechanisms of control rather than proof that the controls worked' (Goodall et al., 2008:47). Empire-authored records were part of an ideology of containment that sought to convey that imperial control was effective in imposing racialized order onto a chaotic and transient situation. Goodall et al. (2008) document seafarers who jumped ship or were abandoned at ports when shipowners went bankrupt, living in port cities, seeking work across the continent or settling in Aboriginal communities where they were not faced with daily racism by white settlers. The knowledge of Indian seafarer lives is absent from dominant Australian national narratives as in addition to the 'illegality' of those who had jumped ship and integrated into different communities, white settler political pressures led to mixed-heritage descendants of Indian and Aboriginal partnerships rejecting their Indian heritage in order to prove their Aboriginality and right to

represent their communities in struggles against white cultural and economic domination (Goodall et al., 2008).

In Britain, racist campaigns built up against Indian, African, Chinese and Caribbean seafarers throughout the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth centuries. The port riots in 1919 were started by local white men and women who attacked people and property in mixed neighbourhoods, blaming African and Asian labourers for the lack of employment during the economic downturn following the First World (Tabili, 1994). One legislative response was the 1919 Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act that ordered preference be given to British crews, assumed to be white, and the deportation of 'destitute coloured seamen'. Despite being officially categorized as British subjects and not 'Aliens' Indian seafarers were 'not quite white enough' to be thought of as British and often, without documentary proof of their status, many were deported alongside seafarers from different areas of Africa and the Caribbean. The 1925 Coloured Alien Seamen Order that consolidated the 1919 amendment required 'coloured seamen' to register with the police and be deported if 'destitute'. As well as African and Caribbean men, Goan Christian seafarers who were not categorized as 'British Indian' and British Indian crew without papers were deported (Ahuja, 2006). Being intentionally or mistakenly deported as an 'Alien' or being forced to return to sea to escape the racist violence and discriminatory legislation further contributed to the strengthening of the dominant idea of the British nation as white in terms of population and culture.

Bordering Partnerships

Complex, multilayered partnerships between employers, unions and compatriots made up the everyday practice of bordering legislation in different colonial contexts. At different periods shipping companies made decisions about who they employed based on contemporary racialized stereotypes and links with diverse local networks they had built up in specific localities across Asia. In the early twentieth century P&O recruiting in Mumbai preferred Muslims from Punjab to work in the engines, deckhands from Gujarat and Christian stewards from Goa whilst the Clan steamship Company chose crew from Sylhet recruited in Kolkata (Ahuja 2006:130). Access to the ships and ensuing mobility reached inland to villages and households as influential crew members -such as *serangs* (boatswain)- recruited via their

own networks. *Serangs* also controlled the lives of seafarers on board through bonds of debt that reached back to villages. Their own dependence on the white officers and financial obligations meant that it was in their interests to ensure that Indian seafarers were kept under surveillance when anchored in docks and caught and punished if they attempted to jump ship (Adams , 1986; Ahuja, 2006:136; Balachandran, 2016:198).

Shipping Companies also sought to control the onshore movements of Indian crews between voyages. In 1922 the P&O company requisitioned an old hulk moored in the Royal Albert Docks in London. Indian crews were forced to live in a floating camp-like exceptional state outside the jurisdiction of Britain's health, sanitation or labour laws and away from the local population (Balachandran, 2016:198; Tabili, 1994:60-61). Shipping companies also wanted to avoid aggravating white seamen's unions which had been opposing what they referred to as cheap Indian labour since the nineteenth century. Unions in the UK and Australia took P&O to court over employing 'coloured' seamen and supported their respective governments' efforts to stop Indians coming ashore and settling in the growing cosmopolitan dockside communities (Goodall et al., 2008: 57). In the UK, during the Second World War, British Indians were subjects of surveillance as both state and non-state actors took on bordering roles in port areas and inland. The National Union and Seamen and port authorities 'sought closer watch on Asian boarding-house keepers to check desertions' and 'any constable or military officer' was empowered to 'arrest an Indian on mere suspicion of desertion' (Balachandran, 2012:186–7). The border was potentially wherever an Indian seafarer was onshore. Working class men from south Asia were forced into legal categories that obliged them to embody the border. In the context of global coloniality, their descendants continue to be the subjects of continuing embodied bordering discourses and practices.

Whilst there is a genealogy in the onshore and onboard bordering practices and the subjects of bordering over time, the categories to which the border was applied in official discourse and practice has changed. Before 1947, Indian seafarers were British colonial subjects and borders experienced related not only to nationality but to their classification in the racialized and class-defined category of 'lascar'. Those borders were managed at ports by ship owners, *serangs* and unions and inland by police and the military. At independence,

Bengal, including the district of Sylhet, was divided between India and East Pakistan. Sylheti seafarers had mostly been recruited after travelling to Kolkata which became part of India in 1947. Many went missing during the violence of Partition and later, as Pakistani citizens faced extortion at the new border controls and found it progressively harder to be recruited in Kolkata as local interests dominated (Balachandran, 2012:277–80). Partition and Independence disrupted geographies of mobility whilst, in response to post-war labour shortages, British borders were open to citizens of the ex-Empire making it more straightforward for seafarers to work legally in manual industries in the UK (Thandi, 2007). In the 1960s, ex-seafarer Aftab Ali from Sylhet, later a politician in East Pakistan, influenced the 'voucher system' that briefly gave thousands of former seafarers and other Sylhetis and Punjabis from East and West Pakistan respectively, legal access to the UK labour market and eventual settlement, establishing today's Bangladeshi and Pakistani British populations (Adams, 1985; Choudhury, 1993 and 1995; Visram, 2002). However, voucher holders as well as British ex-seafarers, including those who owned successful businesses, experienced being thought of as 'not white enough' to be British as they faced further legislative barriers when they wanted to bring their families to live with them. Until DNA testing was used to prove paternity, immigration officials, operating under the Home office's culture of disbelief, consistently denied family reunification to seafarer and voucher-holder families whose long-term settlement and future migration challenged the notion of the white British nation. In 1986, Sona Miah, quoted above, who had worked on over thirty British-owned ships over a thirty-year period and was living in London recounted an experience he shared with many others:

> I married in 1943, went home again three times when my ship went to Calcutta [Kolkata]- got 6 children but the immigration don't believe they are mine … (Adams 1986:138).

Conclusion

Thousands of men sought to escape poverty, famine and oppressive land-based racialized power relations of British-ruled India by working on British-owned merchant ships. Imperial governments constructed maritime legislation that created the inferior racialized outside, or 'not quite' white labour category 'lascar' forcing British Indian

seafarers to embody the racializing border at sea and onshore. Metropolitan and colonial immigration legislation created further racialized bordering practices so that shipping companies, *serangs,* boarding house keepers and others were enabled to report and arrest men living in the UK or white settler colonies based on their perceived identity as 'lascar'. However, racializing borders are never impermeable and seafarers escaped 'lascar' articles at ports across the globe, going on to establish creative communities that in the twenty-first century link mixed-heritage families in the UK and ex-colonies on different continents (Goodall, et al.2008; Bald, 2013). The mobile, global labour force of British Indian seafarers was central to the economies of the British Empire and to Britain's survival in two world wars. However, due to the invisibility of their bodies and experiences, produced and enforced by imperial, racialized, border legislation and everyday bordering practices, their lives have been ignored in dominant white narratives of British history and settler colonies. The partial accounts of south Asian populations as 'recent arrivals', low down a British hierarchy of belonging, continue to construct them as 'not quite white enough' British citizens as outsiders and thus as the 'common sense' targets of toxic everyday state bordering practices. This chapter presents a different story addressing this partiality and challenging this whitening of seafaring and its important role in establishing and resisting imperial national narratives of whiteness.

References

Adams, C., 1987. *Across seven seas and thirteen rivers: life stories of pioneer Sylheti settlers in Britain*. London: THAP Books.

Balachandran, G., 2012. *Globalizing labour? Indian seafarers and world shipping, c 1870–1945*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Balachandran, G., 2016. Indefinite transits: mobility and confinement in the age of steam. *Journal of Global History*, *11*(2), p.187.

Bald, V., 2013. *Bengali Harlem and the lost histories of South Asian America*. Harvard University Press.

Bloch, A. and McKay, S. 2015. 'Employment, social networks and undocumented migrants: The employer perspective'. *Sociology*, *49*(1): 38–55.

Choudhury, Y., 1993. *The roots and tales of Bangladeshi settlers.* Birmingham: Sylheti Social History Group.

Choudhury, Y., 1995. *Sons of the Empire: Oral history from the Bangladeshi seamen who served on British ships during the 1939–45 war*. Birmingham: Sylheti Social History Group.

De Genova, N., 2012. Border, scene and obscene. In T.M. Wilson and H. Donnan (eds) *A Companion to Border Studies*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, ch. 28.

El-Enany, N., 2020*. (B)ordering Britain: Law, Race and Empire*. Manchester: Manchester University Press

Fisher, M., 2004. *Counterflows to colonialism: Indian travellers and settlers in Britain, 1600–1857*. Delhi: Permanent Black.

Gentleman, A., 2019. *The Windrush Betrayal: Exposing the Hostile Environment*. London: Faber & Faber.

Goodall, H., Ghosh, D., and Todd, L.R., 2008 Jumping Ship -Skirting Empire: Indians, Aborigines and Australians across the Indian Ocean. *Transformimg Cultures ejournal*, Vol.3 No 1, February. 44-74

Goodfellow, M., 2019. *Hostile Environment: How Immigrants Became Scapegoats*. London: Verso Books.

Grant, S. and Peel, C. 2015. '"No passport equals no home": An independent evaluation of the "Right to Rent" scheme'. Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants.

Hage, G., 1998. *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*. Annandale: Pluto Press.

Houtum, van H., Kramsch, O. and Zierhofen, W., 2005. Prologue: Bordering space. In H. van Houtum, O. Kramsch and W. Zierhofen (eds) 2005. *Bordering Space*. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 1–13.

Hunter, S., Swan, E. and Grimes, D., 2010. Introduction: Reproducing and resisting whiteness in organizations, policies, and places. *Social Politics*, *17*(4), pp.407-422.

Hyslop J. , (no date) 'Eugene O'Neill and Other Undesirables of Durban Harbour: Policing the Global Maritime Labour Force in Natal, c.1890–1930',

http://www.academia.edu/3893457/Eugene_ONeill_and_other_undesirables_of_Durban_Harbour_Policing_the_Global_Maritime_Labour_Force_in_Natal_c.1890-1930.

Lammy, D. 2018. National day of shame: David Lammy criticises treatment of the Windrush Generation. 16th April. *The Guardian.* (https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/video/2018/apr/16/national-day-of-shame-david-lammy-criticises-treatment-of-windrush-generation-video)

Manhotra, D., 2016. State takes steps to prevent illegal immigrants from getting Aadhaar. 17th March. *The Tribune.* (http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/jammu-kashmir/community/state-takes-steps-to-prevent-illegal-immigrants-from-getting-aadhaar/209709.html).

Mezzadra, S. and Neilson, B. 2013. *Border as method, or the multiplication of labour.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Nayak, A., 2007. Critical whiteness studies. *Sociology Compass*, *1*(2), pp.737-755.

Thandi, S.S., 2007. Migrating to the 'mother country', 1947–1980. In M.H. Fisher, S. Lahiri and S.S. Thandi. 2007. *A South-Asian History of Britain: Four Centuries of Peoples from the Indian Sub-Continent*. Oxford and Westport, CT: Greenwood World Publishing, ch. 7.

Tabili, L, 1994. *"We Ask for British Justice": Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain.* New York: Cornell University Press.

Tlostanova, M.V. and Mignolo, W., 2012. *Learning to unlearn: Decolonial reflections from Eurasia and the Americas*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press.

Visram, R., 2002. *Asians in Britain: 400 years of history*. London: Pluto Press.

Wemyss, G., 2006. The power to tolerate: contests over Britishness and belonging in East London. *Patterns of Prejudice*, *40*(3), pp.215-236.

Wemyss, G., 2009. *The Invisible Empire: White discourse, tolerance and belonging*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Wemyss, G., 2012. 'Littoral Struggles, Liminal Lives: Indian Merchant Seafarers' in Resistances' in Ahmed, R. and Mukherjee, S. eds., 2012. *South Asian Resistances in Britain, 1858-1947*. London: Continuum.

Wemyss, G., 2015. 'Everyday Bordering and Raids Every Day: The Invisible Empire and Metropolitan Borderscapes' in *Borderscaping: Imaginations and Practices of Border Making* Chiara Brambilla, Jussi Laine, James W. Scott & Gianluca Bocchi (eds) Farnham: Ashgate, p. 187.

Williams, W., 2020. *Windrush lessons learned review.* (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874022/6.5577_HO_Windrush_Lessons_Learned_Review_WEB_v2.pdf)

Yuval-Davis, N., Wemyss, G. and Cassidy, K., 2018. Everyday bordering, belonging and the reorientation of British immigration legislation. *Sociology*, *52*(2), pp.228-244. doi.org/10.1177/0038038517702599

Yuval-Davis, N., Wemyss, G., and Cassidy, K., 2019. *Bordering.* Cambridge: Polity

---

[i] I interviewed Ahmed (not their real name) as part of EUBORDERSCAPES research project funded by the European Community's Seventh Framework Programme 2012-16. This quote was used in our resulting publication, *Bordering* (Yuval-Davis,et al, 2019:108) anonymized as 'BJ'.

[ii] Sylhet district in the North-East of Bangladesh. The majority of British-Bangladeshis are descended from people who migrated from this district.

[iii] Recommendation 6 of the Windrush lessons Learned Review was that 'The Home Office should: a) devise, implement and review a comprehensive learning and development programme which makes sure all its existing and new staff learn about the history of the UK and its relationship with the rest of the world, including Britain's colonial history, the history of inward and outward migration and the history of black Britons' (Williams, 2020).

[iv] 'Lascar' originally a Persian word, became a racialized term used to categorise men from Africa or Asia employed on European commanded ships made official in the British 1823 Merchant Shipping Act. As 'Laskar or 'Lascar' It became a term of abuse in English language (Balachandran, 2012). I therefore use the term 'Indian seafarer'.

[v] Suicides from jumping overboard were also recorded as means by which seafarers escaped ships (Balachandran, 2016).