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Race, capital and the British migration–development nexus

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Abstract

Over the past 20 years, migration and development policy have been connected in British politics in two overlapping ways – one argument is centred on migration being used for development, the other using aid to reduce migration. In this article, I argue that two seemingly contradictory policy configurations – development and migration – and the different articulations of their relationship – migration for development and aid to stop migration – stem from the same framework of racialised capitalism. I show how these relationships are in flux; related to the demands of capital and to the different ideological approaches towards migration. In different ways, the nexus helps to produce varying forms of exploitable subjects and enacts control over surplus populations across the ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ world.

Keywords

development aid, immigration, international development, migration-development nexus, racial capitalism, UK asylum policy, UK immigration policy

Introduction

In March 2017, former Prime Minister David Cameron argued in favour of maintaining the international development budget. Reducing immigration was a central part of his reasoning – specifically that ‘poverty abroad’ results in ‘mass migration to Britain’. ‘If we don’t play our part in ensuring that everyone has an education and hope of a decent life’, he wrote in the *Guardian*, ‘then the waves of migration we have seen in recent years will be nothing, compared with in decades to come’ (Cameron, 2017: 2, 3).

By framing his defence of aid in this way, Cameron explicitly brought development together with migration, one of his other major policy focuses. Although not often compared directly, in liberal and left discourses, the two had been conceived of in distinct, arguably antipodal ways; the Conservative government’s development policies seen as a symbol of British benevolence, while their migration policies were understood as restrictive and cruel (Guardian, 2015, 2016). But here, Cameron argued they were related; the former as integral to reducing the latter.

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This was not the first time they had been connected.¹ This relationship, known as the migration–development nexus (hereafter the nexus), was also a matter of relative importance under New Labour, though often with a seemingly reverse line of reasoning, namely, that migration to Britain would help the ‘developing’ world and the British economy. However, by making the argument for the nexus in this way, Cameron was linking development to an intensely racialised debate about exclusionary immigration policy. This should lead us to question, how exactly are these policy areas connected? Is there a racial logic underpinning them? And if there is, given that New Labour promoted somewhat divergent thinking about the nexus, what are the different ways this might operate?

Existing scholarship has gone some way to addressing this first question; drawing links between the nexus and uneven capitalist development, and showing how it is related to immigration regimes. Yet it has presented an incomplete picture because it does not conduct, nor provide us with the tools to conduct, a rigorous comparison of the two, overlapping rationales behind the nexus – one that migration helps development, the other that aid can be used to reduce migration. In turn, we do not have a sufficient explanation of the complex but complementary relationship between migration and development policy.

Furthermore, race has largely been overlooked in this analysis. A handful of this work has paid fleeting attention to the role race might play in some of these dynamics (Glick Schiller, 2009; Pinkerton, 2018); however, it has largely been treated as peripheral.

In this article, I examine the British nexus over the past 20 years² to argue that these two seemingly contradictory policy configurations – development and migration – and the different articulations of their relationship – migration for development and aid to stop migration – stem from the same framework of racialised capitalism (Robinson, 1983/2000; Tilley and Shilliam, 2018). Drawing on theories of racial capitalism, I show how they are connected epistemologically and materially.

Importantly, I do not argue that race structures the nexus in a homogenising or static way. I show how these processes are in flux; capitalism creates different forms of racialised inclusion and exclusion. However, this is not a purely functionalist argument, I also consider the ways shifting ideological approaches to immigration shape how the nexus is framed and which policies are foregrounded.

This article is structured into three parts. The first section analyses existing scholarship on the nexus. I argue that this work does not adequately account for the knotty relationship between migration and development policies, nor for the role that race plays in this. The second section examines theories of racial capitalism to establish how development and immigration policies reproduce and create racialised forms of exploitation and exclusion. Then, I turn to the empirics, which are divided into three parts. First, I analyse the policies connected to the ‘migration as a tool for development’ argument. Second, I consider how ideological approaches to immigration relate to the policies that are privileged at different times. Third, I look to the ways development aid has been used to curb migration. Ultimately, I argue we can understand the nexus through racial capitalism, which helps produce varying forms of exploitable subjects and enacts control over surplus populations across the ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ world.

The migration–development nexus: Overlooking policy differences and sidelining race

While migration and development could be considered antithetical policy configurations, there is a body of analysis that unpicks some of the ways they are connected. A portion of

this scholarship examines how debates about the nexus have changed over the past 60 years; tracking how it has been framed as positive (promoting development), then negative (a form of brain drain) and positive again (De Haas, 2007, 2012; Faist and Fauser, 2011). Although this is important context, the work most relevant for this article analyses the latest incarnation of the debate, which appeared in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

This presents the nexus as positive: migrants are seen as transnational agents of development. Financial and social remittances are a central part of ensuring poor countries are on the correct trajectory, or they are at least key to addressing transient poverty, and can be achieved through temporary and circular migration (Kapur, 2004).

However, there is another approach, which was explicitly articulated in Britain from approximately 2015 onwards: that development can reduce migration. Anchored in neo-classical thinking, this assumes that if the supposed root causes of migration – such as lack of economic opportunities – are addressed through development aid, then there will be a reduction in migration itself. This cannot be entirely separated from the first line of reasoning; some argue that encouraging migration for the purposes of development will eventually reduce migration (see Pinkerton, 2018, for analysis of this argument). Nevertheless, both strategies must be analysed to make sense of the relationship between migration and development policy.

Such a comparison has not yet been conducted in the varied slate of scholarly work on the nexus. Most who examine the ‘aid reduces migration’ argument take an empirical approach, focusing on the correlation between aid and migration levels (Clemens and Postel, 2018; Clist and Restelli, 2021; Gamso et al., 2021; Gamso and Yuldashev, 2018; Martin and Taylor, 1996 Mauro and Rainer, 2021). Such analysis tends to imply that migration is undesirable (De Haas, 2012); it is therefore not the concern of this article because I reject normative assumptions that migration should be reduced.

Another range of scholarship examines the nexus in two, intersecting ways: one primarily looking at unequal development, the other securitisation of migration. Both bodies of work tend to scrutinise the ‘migration as a tool for development’ approach. The first draws on Marxist political economy to argue that unequal development is the reason for migration (Wise, 2021: 102–103). In this analysis – which also recognises how migrants are often exposed to labour exploitation through immigration regimes – much contemporary development is understood as a form of neoliberalism, where measures like structural adjustment programmes increase inequalities, dismantle state support and drive people into unemployment, leading to ‘forced migration’. The nexus, then, is described as producing ‘brain drain’ (Geiger and Pécoud, 2013; Pina-Delgado, 2013; Wise and Covarrubias, 2011; Wise et al., 2013).

The second approach examines migration and securitisation more thoroughly (Faist and Fauser, 2011: 17; Rodriguez and Schwenken, 2013). Pinkerton (2018), for instance, argues the nexus is a technology of governance, which when understood through biopolitics, entices and maintains mobile subjects to exploitative ends. Although Pinkerton (2018: 449) recognises that the ‘migration for development’ argument overlaps with the aim to use ‘development to curb migration’, their focus is on ‘regular and controlled migration’ and so is primarily concerned with the former rationale. Thus, they do not examine some of the other policy approaches that can fall under the nexus.

This scholarship provides important insights that I draw upon later. However, it does not sufficiently make sense of the shifting ways the seemingly opposed policy areas – migration and development – relate to one another nor how the different thinking underpinning the nexus are connected. For instance, while there is mention of mechanisms of

exclusion (Pinkerton, 2018), there is little consideration of how aid is spent on bordering activities. This means existing work cannot address claims in the policy world that utilising aid in this way undermines development principles (Barana, 2017; Castillejo, 2016: 7; Dennison et al., 2019: 13; ICAI, 2017: 13; International Development Committee, 2004: 78–80, 73). More broadly, such approaches cannot clearly unpack the different ways development and migration policy are associated with one another nor how the nexus is structurally organised but also contingent and shifting. That is, it does not adequately allow us to understand how some are actively encouraged to move in the name of development, some are made to stay in the ‘developing’ world and some are excluded through border processes.

Moreover, there is little consideration of the role of race. Most approaches take a predominantly economic view and do not consider forms of racial stratification as central to exploitative economic processes, for example, immigration is simply seen as part of the international division of labour. Yet we know that race is key to these two policy areas and capitalism more generally (Martin, 2020; Tilley and Shilliam, 2018; Wilson, 2012). Still, where it is mentioned, it is done so in passing (Glick Schiller, 2009: 29; Pinkerton, 2018: 9). Thus, the ways race structures the nexus risk being underanalysed.

In sum, while existing work draws attention to the relationship between migration and development, there is not an adequate analysis of the complex ways these seemingly conflicting policy areas and different rationales for the nexus relate to one another, nor how racialised dynamics might produce these processes. I argue that racial capitalism helps us to conduct such an inquiry.

Racialised capitalism: Analysing the structural yet flexible nature of the nexus

There has been an increasing interest in the concept of racial capitalism over the past 5 years. Tracing its roots back to analysis of apartheid South Africa and Cedric Robinson’s (1983/2000) work, this approach understands race as constitutive to capitalism, not produced by it. The tools that this theory provides are useful for examining the nexus as they allow for a capacious understanding of processes of racialisation, enabling us to see the structural yet flexible and contingent nature of racialised forms of exploitation and exclusion.

In this telling, racialisation is not simply a product of historic prejudice but a central part of global capitalism. Recognising this does not mean overlooking broader ideological concerns that are historically and geographically contingent; these are part of and interact with economic rationales and play a role in shaping processes of racialisation at different times (Hall, 1980). Rather it shows that race is not an epiphenomenon of economic exploitation but is ‘constitutive of the productive process and the social relations of production under capitalism’ (Harris, 2021: 13; Sweeney, 2021: 189).

Drawing on Wynter (2003), Tilley and Shilliam expand on this. They argue that race – which firmly defines the ‘extrahuman’, excluding groups from ‘the frame of human’ and ‘the norms of ethical treatment’ – is deeply connected to conceptualisations of the economy. ‘The ethnoclassed homo economicus is represented as the human itself’, they write, ‘and the material struggle is between Man and those defined as outside of Man as the proper economic subject’ (Tilley and Shilliam, 2018: 537–538).

Thus, not all labour exploitation develops in the same way, racial stratification changes to create differential forms of exploitation and neglect (Danewid, 2020; Lowe, 2015:

150). Capitalism functions by ‘leveraging, intensifying, and creating racial distinctions’ (Jenkins and Leroy, 2021: 53). Racial capitalism brings attention to the dialectic between capitalism ‘as a homogenising force, incorporating different cultures, regional economies and populations into a global market of waged labour relations’ (though not everyone is turned into a waged worker) and capitalism as ‘an inherently differentiating process’ (Bird and Schmid, 2021: 6–7).

Furthermore, the inequalities that are a product of racial capitalism are explained away as ‘behavioural deficits’ and justified as natural (Jenkins and Leroy, 2021: 53; Tilley and Shilliam, 2018: 538). Meanwhile, instances of racial violence – such as border violence – are exceptionalised as separate from capitalist processes of accumulation and dispossession, obscuring how they are often deeply connected to and/or produced by them.

Racialised stratification is relevant to understanding the global inequalities that are the focus of development work. A small but substantial body of work on race and development shows how international development assumes that ‘developing’ countries are in a cultural and civilisational binary with those that are ‘developed’. Rooted in supposed endogenous difference and borne of ‘natural’ processes, this is a racialised articulation of underdevelopment, where global poverty is often understood as threatening (Goodfellow, 2019b; Kothari, 2006a, 2006b: 15; Noxolo, 2004; Pierre, 2020; Wilson, 2012).

Yet racialisation is not solely limited to the discursive realm. For instance, development efforts attempt to make women and girls entrepreneurial subjects, treating them as possessing the limitless capacity to cope. Such approaches are ‘deeply racialized’, assuming people in the global south to be ‘hyper-industrious subjects’ (Wilson, 2015: 807). Thus, if one of the tendencies of capitalism is to Hoover up labour, this process in the ‘developing’ world is marked by racialisation that exposes the ‘to-be-developed’ to distinct forms of exploitation.

Migration can also be analysed through the prism of racialised capital (Walia, 2021). The governance of migrants – whether they are admitted, sustained and kept in place through humanitarianism or actively excluded – is ‘related to their position within contemporary capitalism’ (Rajaram, 2018: 627). Migrants can be folded into the labour processes based on differential exclusion, working in low-paid sectors, exposed to significant forms of degradation and exploitation (Walia, 2021). Yet they may be excluded altogether if they are deemed surplus to the needs of capital; considered relatively valueless, threatening and thus exposed to carceral methods of control (Martin, 2020: 741).

In both development and migration, the specific policies pursued are also related to broader ideological co-ordinates of respective governments. Yet for the moment, we can see forms of extra-humanity are produced through ideas of ‘underdevelopment’, hyperindustriousness and threat. In each of these instances, we can understand race and racialisation as a ‘constellation of processes and practices’ (Frankenberg, 2001: 73) that are not ‘a simple empirical description of skin colour’ (Anderson, 2013: 35) nor solely identifiable through phenotype. In this formulation, racialisation as part of capitalism produces extra-humanity that exposes certain groups, at certain times, to severe vulnerabilities. This will prove pertinent for later analysis.

Although there is work that examines development and migration as shaped by racialised forms of exploitation and disposability, there is yet to be a comparison of how different groups under development and migration policies are integrated into racialised capitalism. We can use theories of racialised capitalism to help us examine this relationship, particularly through its consideration of the ‘local’ and the ‘global’. As Danewid (2020: 300) argues, Robinson considered how the plantations of Mississippi *and* the factories of

Manchester were run, understanding them as differentiated and complementary parts of the same global economy. With regard to nexus, we can identify the multi-layered interconnections between the supposedly distinct spatial areas of the ‘developing’ and ‘developed’ world. It is to this analysis we will now turn.

Racialised inclusion and exclusion: The shifting logics of Britain’s migration–development nexus

In 2015, the Conservatives pledged that the aid budget would be used to tackle ‘the root causes of migration’ (DfID, 2015: 17) and could also ‘discourage mass migration’ (Dominiczak, 2015). This overt focus on using aid to reduce migration was somewhat new, but this connection between development and migration was not. Under New Labour, a 2007 DfID paper outlined that department must ‘maximise the benefits and reduce the risks of migration for poor people and developing countries’ (DfID, 2007: 3).

Although they overlap, these two stated approaches – one using aid to reduce migration and the other encouraging migration for development – characterise the dominant narrative about the nexus at different times. Under each fall two policy areas: migration as a tool for development focuses on remittances and circular and temporary immigration, while using aid to reduce migration centres development policies that tackle the ‘root causes’ of migration and that enact different forms of bordering. The first set of policies are predicated on forms of inclusion within Britain and the second on exclusion. Nevertheless, despite the differences between these two approaches, the following pages will show that they are connected through the dictates of racialised capitalism.

Furthermore, I recognise that these different arguments for the nexus and the different policies that coincide with them overlap with one another. Yet, I pay due attention to which approach is rhetorically foregrounded and which appears to be pursued more vigorously at different moments and how this relates to broader ideological approaches to immigration.

Racialised inclusion: Migrants as ‘agents of development’

One of the main thrusts of the nexus is that migration should be harnessed to help development. Thus, migrants may be selectively brought into the British labour market as agents of development, and this can be achieved through two related areas of policy: remittances and temporary/circular migration. Both seek to address how migration could help ‘development’ in the ‘developing’ world, but the latter is also focuses on how migration could benefit Britain.

In the 2000s, migration was framed as a ‘pro-poor’ strategy; supported by some scholarship at the time (Taylor, 1999), there was a specific focus on the benefits remittances yielded to ‘developing’ countries (DfID, 2004: 2; 26). DfID set up the Remittances Taskforce in 2009, which compared transaction costs of different providers and established the Remittances Charter to provide people with information about the best regulated channels through which to send money home (Datta, 2009). This approach persisted to a degree under the Coalition government; in 2013, they ‘set up an Action Group on Cross Border Remittances’, which brought together governmental departments and a range of financial actors who helped ‘identify market-led solutions for ensuring the continued flow of remittances’ (gov.uk, n.d., 2012; Pinkerton, 2018). Development policy and migration policy were thus linked through programmes that ensured individuals were able to send remittances home through government-approved channels.

Complementing or intertwined with this were arguments for circular and temporary migration. New Labour Secretary of State for International Development Hilary Benn said there was an ‘increasing [. . .] demand for both skilled labour, and for cheap and flexible labour, particularly in richer countries in which societies are ageing’ (cited in DfID, 2007: iii). And a 2007 DfID (2007: 2) paper stated, ‘opportunities to migrate into low-skilled jobs can and do offer a rapid route out of poverty’, with a specific mention of temporary migration (UK Border Agency, 2009: 10). Although, circular migration schemes were not implemented (Pinkerton, 2018), temporary immigration routes continued to be used. This consisted of a more ‘open’ labour migration programme, whereby immigration was encouraged, because it was seen as good for the economy.

The way this was structured changed over New Labour’s time in office; for instance, in 2005, it was announced the government would eventually turn the 80 different routes into the country into a so-called points-based system (PBS) with five tiers (Consterdine, 2018). Regardless of how the immigration system was organised, in varied and changing ways, rights were stratified and curbed. For instance, on ‘low-skilled’ schemes, some only had the right to stay for 1 year, and under the newer system ‘low-skilled’ migrants were denied routes to citizenship (Consterdine, 2018; Goodfellow, 2019a: 104; 116).

These two policy areas, then, were central to the ‘making migration work for development’ framing. Yet the question remains: what can this tell us about the relationship between migration and development, and how might this be understood through racialised capitalism?

In the literature on remittances, there are at least two critiques relevant to answering these questions. First, we can, to some extent, understand remittance policies as shaped by ideas of racialised threats related to the War on Terror. The regulatory measures introduced by DfID were ‘heavily influenced by security concerns related to money laundering and terrorist funding’ and were ‘driven by a desire to eradicate informal money transfers which may not necessarily be in the best interests of migrants’ (Datta, 2009: 119). Certain money transfers were ‘differentiated on the basis of ties to race, ethnicity, or religion’, specifically targeting those thought to be Muslim. In this ‘western money’ – related to the ‘white, male [and] placeless’ – can be ‘disembodied’ and is seen as legitimate while other ‘illegitimate’ money is ‘particularist, racialized, play-bound [and] feminized’, and it must be embodied ‘so that it can be monitored’ (Atia, 2007: 462, 461). Therefore, policies on remittances for the purposes of development have arguably been shaped by processes of racialised containment and surveillance.

Second, we must consider the broader way such policies are intended to support development. Through remittances, it is expected that ‘some of the most exploited workers in the world can make up for the failure of mainstream development policies’ (Wise, 2021: 106). Individuals are imagined as ‘ideal type migrants’; the heroes of development who provide for people ‘at home’. This involves promoting individual responsibility for ‘development’ in the context where structural adjustment programmes shrink state capacity (Bastia, 2013: 466; Rodriguez and Schwenken, 2013: 381; Wise et al., 2013: 439). There is potential for particularly heightened forms of exploitation, which assume the subjects in question are ‘extrahuman’ (Tilley and Shilliam, 2018: 537–538). This can be understood as a specifically racialised form of exploitation, where individuals are expected to have an endless capacity to work; to be sources of capital surplus value and provide for their home country. Racialisation, then, is not only present in the concept of threat but also in the responsibility placed on those expected to deliver ‘development’.

To further make sense of how racialisation is functioning here, we might consider the role of certain migrants as remittance providers to their home countries *and* as labourers within Britain. This is relevant to understanding the relationship between migration and development policy because the British immigration regime shapes the conditions in which remittance-senders are operating and because, though not funded by development aid or implemented by DfID, temporary migration was described by DfID as a route out of poverty.

Immigration regimes produce temporary and insecure workers by categorising some as admissible on differential terms and imposing employment relations that can help determine conditions of stay. Precarity is 'structurally produced by the interaction of employment and immigration legislation' (Anderson, 2010: 301, 311). Indeed, many who migrated – including those on 'high skilled' schemes – were and are subject to a 'set of discriminatory practices'; visa prices and strict controls on the forms of state support available mean they were and are 'exposed to high levels of indebtedness' (Bird and Schmid, 2021: 13; Castle, 2006: 741–766). In addition, there are other factors at play – for instance, many are 'dequalified' by having their professional and educational credentials invalidated' and are often left with no option than to take 'low skilled' lower paid jobs (Bird and Schmid, 2021: 13). This is an act of social differentiation where knowledge and skills abroad are imagined as lesser to those in Britain.

Given the number and the complexity of routes, the different nationalities of people arriving and the nature of the data available, providing a complete picture of who such policies were applied to and in which sectors is difficult. However, data suggest that between the early 1990s and 2000s, there was a shift towards 'new labour sources from less economically developed countries, including India, the Philippines, Malaysia and China' (Clarke and Salt, 2003: 574). Although these people were not exclusively entering 'low-skilled' work, insecurity shaped many migrants' lives (Anderson, 2010: 304).

For example, some people coming from the Punjab experienced underemployment or had to work – at least for a period – in lower paid jobs in part because their skills did not immediately transfer across (Qureshi et al., 2013: 187), while people from Zimbabwe employed in the care sector experienced a deskilling and 'loss of status'. This was partly because of 'acute labour market shortages' and because there were few routes available to them to migrate to Britain given that Zimbabwe was the 'target of specific controls' (McGregor, 2007). It is thought that this case had broader relevance for understanding why 'new African diasporas' became 'concentrated in care and cleaning in the UK, despite their skills and middle-class, often professional backgrounds' (McGregor, 2007: 920).

These different trajectories demonstrate that the racialised nature and outcomes of immigration policies are not always straightforwardly or actively applied. At different moments through the immigration regime, people are differentially exposed to precarity. This is not strictly related to phenotype; for example, people from the same nationality and/or racial background can be treated differently depending on a range of factors, including income. And, as the Government hoped, with the introduction of the PBS and European Union (EU) accession in the 2000s, 'low-skilled' migrants in low-paid, insecure jobs were increasingly from Poland, the Ukraine, and other central and Eastern European countries (Anderson, 2010: 305). Due to their EU citizenship, their 'temporariness' was not 'state enforceable' – in contrast to non-EU migrants, some of whom may never have been able to develop a 'permanent attachment' – but a range of factors, including racialised notions of perceived cultural difference and a process of dequalification help explain this exposure to extreme precarity (Anderson, 2010: 306).

What is of issue is not only that these policies were applied to people who might be considered racial 'others' on the basis of appearance or nationality, though this is also a factor, but immigration policies are part of racialising move. Through deskilling and through notions of cultural difference, people are 'othered' and devalued, at least in part, for the purposes of profit. The normalisation of intense levels of exploitation of 'low skilled' migrants is arguably rooted in and produces a racialised extra-humanity.

The intricacies of this stratification requires further research, but this suggests that the nexus entices and encourages mobility (Pinkerton, 2018) and that this functions through the production of racialised differential status. This dovetails with broader ideas of racialised securitisation; the need to monitor certain 'othered' groups and maintain their temporariness because of the potential that they will destabilise cultural norms. This also provides crucial context for making sense of remittances; they are frequently 'generated by underpaid, exploited and often excluded migrants' who have to make 'emotional and economic' sacrifices to send money back home (Datta et al., 2007: 62).

To summarise, I have argued migration and development are connected through racialised capitalism because of the ways migrants are constructed as a developmental resource for their home country and Britain. Certain groups of people are deemed useful to capital, differentially classified through migration regimes and thus permitted to enter the country into low-paid job and under temporary migration regimes. Concurrently ideas of racialised threat shape policies, such as remittances, that are directed towards some of these groups. Through the immigration regime, racialised distinctions are created and leveraged (Jenkins and Leroy, 2021: 53) for the purposes of profit.

Ideological differences on immigration

However, this is not all that is at play – ideological approaches to immigration also interact with the needs of capital, shaping the nexus in distinct ways. Before exploring the 'aid to reduce migration' approach, I will analyse this because although both rationales exist under the period examined, certain policies are more clearly pursued at different moments. To make sense of such shifts, we must take into account the broader political treatment of immigration.

The above policies appear to have been the primary focus under New Labour. The government at the time pursued a liberal framing; temporary migration – exploitative and racialised in the ways previously discussed – was seen as good for the economy, and this existed alongside racialised securitisation and anti-refugee policy that targeted 'bogus asylum seekers' (Back et al., 2002; Consterdine, 2020: 183; Schuster and Solomos, 2004). This was related to New Labour's Third Way under which migration policy was at least partly seen as a way to respond to labour shortages in both 'low' and 'high' skilled jobs and as a way to 'grow' the economy (Consterdine and Hampshire, 2014).

There was a change to immigration policy under the Coalition and then Conservative governments, which included a move away from championing immigration as a source of economic growth for Britain. Even prior to 2010, a worsening economic situation, worsening public opinion and the eventual rise of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)³ meant New Labour began changing their approach to migration in the late 2000s (Consterdine, 2020; Goodfellow, 2019a).

However, under the Coalition and then Conservative governments, immigration was, to a greater extent than before, presented as a potentially destabilising force, but importantly one that if ‘better controlled’ could benefit the British economy. These governments pursued further restrictive measures, such as narrowing visa eligibility and introducing a net migration target, minimum income thresholds and the hostile environment policies. Despite this, net migration (itself a flawed ‘measure’ of movement, see Anderson, 2013) did not steadily fall, though there was a drop in 2012, and there was a further reduction in people arriving from non-EU countries between 2010 and 2013 (ONS, 2015). These governments continued to admit certain groups of migrants, often people classed as ‘highly skilled’ or the ‘best and the brightest’, seen as useful to the economy (Consterdine, 2022), and they also utilised some temporary programmes. This meant that there was, to some extent, a continuation of the New Labour approach which categorised immigration in relation to economic worth (Consterdine, 2020) and social status (Anderson, 2013).

Nonetheless, there were tighter restrictions. But such measures did not necessarily mean the domestic labour market no longer ‘needed’ immigration. The shift towards more limited routes of entry was arguably the result of a confluence of factors, including the electoral threat of UKIP and the government overseeing a worsening economic situation, whereby there was a general tendency, to incorrectly blame this on immigration.

Ideological splits also played a role. There was a relative tension within the Conservative Party between free market champions and those more focused on social conservatism. This appeared to result in draconian policy with some ‘subtle concessions to business’, which included dividing up good migrants who brought capital and skills from the bad, people who were low paid (Consterdine, 2022). This broader context, alongside resistance to the aid budget, arguably explain why the ‘development to curb migration’ argument was foregrounded when it was.

It also shows that immigration regimes do not always operate through systemic logic that is entirely structured around the needs of the domestic labour market, they are also influenced by ideological approaches and disagreements. Ideological shifts, then, matter because they allow us to better make sense of the changing ways the nexus has been predominantly conceived, impacting which policies are favoured. As will become apparent in the following section, these changes can still benefit capital in a range of ways, but they go some way to help explain the prevalence of certain approaches to the nexus.

Racialised exclusion: reducing migration through aid

The second aim of the nexus has been to reduce migration. Under this, there are two policy areas: one focused on development policies, the other on border policies. I understand them as producing different forms of racialised exclusion, keeping the ‘other’ out of Britain in different ways and to different ends, at least in part related to varying forms of capitalist exploitation.

In 2015, Cameron announced Britain would provide ‘£200 million in bilateral aid to Africa to tackle the root causes of migration’. This included £15 million in humanitarian assistance for people forcibly displaced, £125 million for access to basic services for refugees in Ethiopia, and £33 million ‘for economic development programmes in Somalia and East Africa’ to ‘boost private sector investment in agriculture and high value industries and create tens of thousands of new jobs’ (gov.uk, 2015). Part of the strategy, then, was to reduce migration through development policies in specific

countries. This was not the last time the government committed money in this way (gov. uk, 2017) and New Labour had previously argued poverty reduction was important to stop forced migration and ‘developing countries’ needed support to ‘manage migration flows’ (see DfID, 1997: 68; DfID, 2007: 3; see also DfID, 2004: 73, about concerns of using aid to limit migration).

As well as this a portion of aid money was used to curb ‘illicit’ migration (movement not sanctioned by states such as Britain). The government’s ‘Illegal Migration Strategy’, which sought to ‘limit the number of irregular migrants arriving in Europe and the UK’, was part-funded from the aid budget (ICAI, 2017: i). In addition, the Safety, Support and Solutions Programme for Refugees and Migrants Phase II (SSS II) was a £70.3 million programme (cut from £78 million due to the pandemic, DfID, 2021a: 1), which was largely focused on ‘the facilitation of orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility’ (DfID, 2021b). This included humanitarian assistance, funding ‘returns’, integration programmes, and TV and radio campaigns explaining the risks of migrating (DfID, 2021a: 10). This range of approaches highlights how aid money was directed towards curbing ‘illicit’ migration. This looks to be a relatively new development as New Labour did not appear to utilise aid spending for border policies and is mostly likely related to the ideological shifts outlined previously.

In the changing context of cuts to the aid budget, the merger of DfID with the Foreign Office and post-Brexit changes to the immigration system (Lightfoot et al., 2017: 521; Loft and Brien, 2021), it seems using aid to reduce migration will continue to be pursued. The Boris Johnson-led government committed to further limiting immigration and announced an economic development programme in Rwanda as part of an agreement to send people seeking asylum to the country (Worley, 2022). They appeared, then, to be committed to utilising aid for bordering. Furthermore, in the context of so-called Channel crisis crossings, Labour Party leader Keir Starmer argued that part of the reason people were making this journey was because the government had cut development spending and thus could not ‘solve the problem’ ‘upstream’ (cited in politics.co.uk, 2021). This indicates they will use aid to address ‘root causes’. In both instances, this suggests future governments will continue to use aid to reduce migration – or claim they are doing so – either through border policies, development policies or both.

We can initially see the relation between development policy and migration policy through the concept of threat. Divorced from histories of colonial plunder and contemporary policies of racialised capitalist development, politicians present the ‘developing’ world as a space of chaos, where poverty is endogenously produced in ‘developing countries’ (Goodfellow, 2019b, for examples see:; Amos cited in Wroe and Doney, 2003:24; Greening, 2015; Benn cited in Wroe and Doney, 204: 31). Meanwhile, certain migrant groups are marked out as inalienably different; they must be kept out because of cultural difference or their supposed ability to do anything they can to access economic opportunities (Goodfellow, 2019a). In both instances, and like the construction of migrants in Britain as potential threats who need to be monitored, this thinking is racialised because it is predicated on notions of endogenous difference and ‘behavioural deficits’ where poverty, inequality and the need to exclude are treated as natural (Sabaratnam, 2020; Tilley and Shilliam, 2018).

Yet there is a crucial difference when we apply the framework of racial capitalism. In the ‘developing’ world, the ‘to-be-developed’ are a potential source for ‘progress’; much like the migrant who sends home remittances and/or who benefits the British economy, they are useful to capital and somewhat redeemable. It is imagined one of the ways to achieve ‘development’ is through working with the private sector to improve access to

markets, financial services, property and land markets, and the job market (Marois and Pradella, 2015: 1–12; Mawdsley, 2015: 355). Private sector investment and partnerships are tied with a broader growth agenda, and under this, ‘job quality’ seems of little concern. What appears to be secondary, then, are the ways that people in these countries are brought into development processes; they seem to be viewed as a resource for the expansion of capital (Mawdsley, 2015).

This is set against the racialised understanding of ‘underdeveloped’ populations; they need support ‘developing’ because they are incapable of doing so themselves. It is possible to see this as context through which to make sense of certain development policies. Unable to ‘develop’ themselves, these populations are incorporated into development processes as racialised ‘others’ and then treated as such. As Wilson (2012); has argued in relation to the focus on ‘women-and-girls’ as the engine of ‘development’, interventions are often predicated on notions of a limitless ability to cope. Like migrants that are permitted to enter Britain, the agents of ‘development’ within country are racialised as hyperindustrious, and such a classification is leveraged for profit (Jenkins and Leroy, 2021: 53). In this case, however, their usefulness only exists outside of Britain. Thus, it is possible to argue that as ‘potential unwanted migrants’, they are excluded from Britain on the grounds of racialised threat but as ‘developers’ in-country, they are folded into market relations on racialised terms.

In contrast, utilising aid for border policies arguably stems from both the ideological belief in an even more restrictive immigration system and the notion that certain populations are not deemed useful to capital. This does not always directly map onto the needs of the domestic labour market; at times, some who are excluded are, for instance, wanted by capital within a certain country. Still, the way groups are governed is often at least partly connected to their ‘position within contemporary capitalism’ (Rajaram, 2018: 627). Measures such as Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes and externalised border controls are a “‘fix” for surplus, risky, and racialized populations’. This is another aspect of mobility not clearly explored by existing scholarship on the nexus; carcerality operates as a form of ‘mobility through the redirection of people’ (Martin, 2020: 741). Such restrictive border regimes aim ‘to regulate the structural contradiction between the negative consequences of a capitalist overaccumulation and multicrisis [. . .] and the fundamental obstinacy and relational autonomy of the global working class, and especially its escape strategies’ (Georgi, 2019: 561; 572). These groups of people are rendered surplus to capital, constructed as inherently untrustworthy and thus excluded.

This racialised exclusion is also identifiable in humanitarian development activities that are part of the 2015 ‘root causes’ approach and SSSII (DfID, 2018: 2, 2021: 1). This might seem divorced from attempts to discourage people from migrating, but such humanitarian interventions are about ‘saving lives’ *and* governing populations – in some instances, the focus is specifically on those excluded from the capitalist class and unable to become wage labourers because of capital accumulation (Duffield, 2010).

Drawing on the concept of the humanitarian border (Walters, 2011) – which examines how governmental and non-governmental humanitarian processes constitute border regimes, controlling life and mobility of border populations – existing work shows that developmental humanitarianism plays a role in keeping undesirable populations at a distance through racialised notions of threat and non-belonging (Bird and Schmid, 2021). Meanwhile ‘migration deals’ – where money is allocated to host countries – can lead to refugee commodification, which includes the expulsion of those groups that do not materially benefit the host country (Tsourapas, 2019). Ultimately, by caring for these populations

relegated to the margins by accumulation, humanitarian development can mask the racialisation that treats these people as peripheral and can in turn secure the legitimacy of capital (Sanyal, 2007: 93). This, then, adds another layer to how we might understand the nexus operating; in this instance, working to obscure racialised exclusion.

Therefore, there is a comparable process of racialisation in operation through the way migrants in Britain, the 'to-be-developed' and excluded migrants are constructed, as security threats who possess inherent difference. If we compare the 'global' context with the 'local', we can see those migrants who are admitted to Britain and send remittances home are presented as a potential threat, but this is seen as containable and their presence necessary because of their usefulness to capital.

Although unwanted migrants and the 'to-be-developed' share a similarity in their exclusion, there is a key difference. While the unwanted migrant is excluded as a racialised threat because of their superfluity to capital, the 'to-be-developed' in their country of origin possess the possibility to develop. They are, then, potential agents of development who though unable to 'develop' independently, can be incorporated into capitalism as racialised hyperindustrious workers. On this basis, there is another interconnection between the 'local' and 'global'; though the 'to-be-developed' are excluded from Britain, they may be, like migrants in Britain, exposed to racialised forms of exploitation.

Finally, although forms of racial violence exemplified by border policies are often treated as separate from or in tension with development policy (e.g. Dennison et al., 2019: 13), the above analysis shows they are connected through processes of racialised exploitation and expulsion. Those central to capitalism are incorporated as hyperindustrious individuals while those surplus to the needs of capital are excluded.⁴ The tools of racial capitalism, then, reveal that border policy does not exist separately from but is connected to development through racialised capitalism.

Conclusion

This article has argued that British development and migration policy, and the different articulations of their relationship, stem from the same framework of racialised capitalism. By drawing connections between the 'local' and the 'global', I have shown that these relationships are produced by the racialised capitalism in shifting ways, which can be understood by considering the demands of capital and different ideological approaches to immigration.

More precisely, migrants in Britain and supposed 'potential unwanted migrants' in the 'developing' world are treated differently; the former are included in Britain and the latter are excluded. Yet both may be folded into capitalist processes on exploitative terms through racialised mechanisms of differentiation that assume them to be hyperindustrious. This shows some of the ways capitalism needs racialised labour in different localities.

Meanwhile, certain groups of migrants are, like the 'potential migrants' in the 'developing world', excluded from Britain on the basis of racialised threat at different times. Yet the former, unlike the latter, are often superfluous to capital; the threat they pose is insurmountable, at least, we could assume, until they return 'home'. They are thus redirected through border and humanitarian policies. This shows how bordering is not exceptional and does not undermine development, as such, but works in the same system of racialised capitalism. Examining these policies reveals, too, how humanitarian approaches govern unwanted populations but do so in such a way that masks the racialisation that treats these people as peripheral because they are superfluous.

Given the role that ideological approaches to migration can play in shaping the nexus, how' the relationship between these policies and the balance between these two rationales develops remain to be seen. Ultimately, however, I argue we can understand the nexus – and its different articulations – as structured by shifting processes of racial capitalism.

Author's Note

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Notes

1. For discussion of the EU nexus, see Zardo (2022).
2. I do not analyse all policies under the nexus, this is not necessarily possible (ICAI, 2017: 22).
3. None of this is inevitable; it was at least partly produced by New Labour's political and policy agenda.
4. I do not argue that using aid in this way does not matter; it could mean more people will be exposed to greater forms of border violence (Raty and Shilhav, 2020: 3; Zardo, 2022).

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