City Research Online

City St George's, University of London

Citation: Clifford, E. (2025). “I Belong, but Do I Really Belong?” the Suspended Future of the “Modern Slave” in British Protection Politics. International Political Sociology, 19(4), olaf035. doi: 10.1093/ips/olaf035

This is the published version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version. To cite this item please consult the publisher's version.

Permanent repository link: https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/35843/

Link to published version: https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olaf035

Copyright and Reuse: Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, unless otherwise indicated, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way. For full details of reuse please refer to City Research Online policy.

City Research Online: http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/ publications@citystgeorges.ac.uk

International Political Sociology (2025) **19**, olaf035

"*I Belong, but Do I Really Belong*?" the Suspended Future of the "Modern Slave" in British Protection Politics

EMILY CLIFFORD*

City St George's, University of London, UK

Drawing on interview material with Beth, a Nigerian woman with experience of trafficking to the UK, this paper interrogates the future politics of British anti-modern slavery policy. I argue that the political time of Britain's approach to modern slavery figures the so-called modern slave as a pre-political, temporally suspended "infantile citizen" (Berlant 1997), whose expected entry into the public sphere provides the moral justification for territorial and cultural borders. I then discuss how the spectre of embodied identity brings this into crisis, as the non-White and the non-Western pose a specific threat to the nation by revealing its foundational violence. Through my conversation with Beth, I bring these processes of infantilization and criminalization into sharp relief. In so doing, I reveal the temporal impossibility of anti-slavery rhetoric, which positions the modern slave in a state of "animated suspension" (Berlant 2011).

Se fondant sur les matériaux d'un entretien avec Beth, une Nigériane familière avec la traite d'êtres humains vers le Royaume-Uni, cet article s'interroge sur l'avenir de la politique de lutte contre l'esclavage moderne en Grande-Bretagne. J'affirme que l'époque politique de l'approche britannique de l'esclavage moderne représente l'≪ esclave moderne ≫ comme un ≪ citoyen infantile ≫ (Berlant, 1997) prépolitique et suspendu temporellement, dont l'entrée attendue dans la sphère publique justifie les frontières territoriales et culturelles sur le plan moral. Je traite ensuite de la façon dont le spectre de l'identité incarnée plonge ceci en état de crise, car le non-blanc et le non-occidental représentent une menace spécifique pour la nation en révélant ses violences fondatrices. Au travers de ma conversation avec Beth, je mets en exergue ces processus d'infantilisation et de criminalisation. Ce faisant, je révèle l'impossibilité temporelle de la rhétorique anti-esclavage, qui place l'esclave moderne dans un état de ≪ suspension animée ≫ (Berlant, 2011).

Este artículo utiliza material extraído de entrevistas con Beth, una mujer nigeriana con experiencia en trata de personas hacia el Reino Unido, con el fin de cuestionar la futura política británica contra la esclavitud moderna. Argumentamos que el tiempo político del enfoque de Gran Bretaña con respecto a la esclavitud moderna se asemeja al llamado esclavo moderno, como un ≪ciudadano infantil≫ (Berlant 1997) prepolítico y temporalmente suspendido, cuya entrada esperada en la esfera pública proporciona la justificación moral para las fronteras territoriales y culturales. A continuación, debatimos sobre cómo el espectro de la identidad representada provoca una crisis a este respecto, ya que lo no blanco y lo no occidental representan una amenaza específica para la nación debido a que revelan sus violencias fundamentales. A través de nuestra conversación con Beth, ponemos de manifiesto estos procesos de infantilización

Clifford, Emily (2025) "*I Belong, but Do I Really Belong*?" the Suspended Future of the "Modern Slave" in British Protection Politics. *International Political Sociology*, https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olaf035

*Corresponding author: City St George's, University of London, UK. Email: emilyclifford19@gmail.com; Email: emily.clifford@city.ac.uk

© The Author(s) 2025. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the International Studies Association. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted reuse, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

y criminalización. En este proceso, revelamos la imposibilidad temporal de la retórica antiesclavista, que posiciona al esclavo moderno en un estado de ≪suspensión animada≫ (Berlant 2011).

But do I really belong? I don't. You never do. Because it is something, like, they give it to you, right, but then it's like, you have it, they won't tell you this, but you better watch your step. They'll take it away. Do you know what I mean? It can easily be taken away from you. Like, OK, here… I belong in this country, but I am only belonging for five years. Because after five years, you are… and then what?
(Beth)

Behind each statistic lies the story of a person or a family who can look forward to a better future because of the generosity of the British people. We celebrate that (Great Britain. Home Office 2021a, 2).

I met Beth[1] as she was beginning her undergraduate degree in children's nursing. As we talked, she candidly detailed her human trafficking[2] experience, which involved a childhood and early adulthood of domestic servitude in Nigeria and Britain. Now in her early thirties, she exited exploitation 5 years previously by confiding in a colleague. From there, the Salvation Army arranged safehouse accommodation, and she was entered into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), the UK's framework for identifying and supporting people experiencing "modern slavery."[3] Beth now has protected status, secure housing, and is committed to both overcoming her trauma and seeking justice.

And yet, Beth's optimism was inflected with unease. Hers is a success story of British government protection; she describes moving from powerlessness to resilience within the framework of British support mechanisms, ostensibly demonstrating the strength of Britain's "world-leading" approach to modern slavery (Great Britain. Home Office 2019, 7). Nevertheless, a temporal analysis of Beth's experiences casts doubts on this triumphalist account. Beth details feelings of protracted temporariness, constituted at the point where her imagined future security met ever more restrictive border controls: "*you better watch your step.*" This intensified shortly after our first meeting, when the Conservative government announced their controversial New Plan for Immigration. This simultaneously promised a "better future" for the so-called modern slave whilst setting increasingly restrictive parameters around who could claim this subjectivity (Jovanovic 2023). In this paper, I draw on Beth's experiences to problematize the temporal logics shaping Britain's approach to modern slavery and their role in wider national politics.

With an uncritical celebration of Britain's nineteenth century abolitionists, contemporary British anti-modern slavery rhetoric is explicitly temporal, whilst professing the timeless quality of (neo)liberal development. Critical commentary cap-

[1]Beth is a pseudonym chosen by the interviewee.

[2]I use the definition of human trafficking found in Article 4(a) of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005): "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the removal of organs." A similar definition is found in The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children (UN General Assembly 2000 GA RES 55/25, 15 November 2000, Article 3a).

[3]I use the term "slavery" to talk about the legal ownership of another, as practiced during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. "Modern slavery," on the other hand, encompasses a broad range of exploitative practices including holding someone in slavery or servitude, requiring them to perform forced or compulsory labor, and human trafficking.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

tures the silencing effect of these claims at historicization (Hua 2011; O'Connell Davidson 2015; Hua 2018; Davies et al. 2024). And yet, few researchers have spoken of the lived implications of this temporal politics vis-à-vis individuals with trafficking experience. This is a crucial element of the puzzle, because the manipulation of protection-seekers' lived time contributes to the naturalization of colonially inspired social hierarchies (Canning 2019; Shepherd 2024). Despite extensive literature on the temporal dimensions of mobility and protection-seeking (Jacobsen et al. 2021), then, much less is known about the lived temporalities of post-trafficking experiences. This constitutes a significant gap in our understanding not only of the meaning-making processes of those affected, but also of the contextual ways in which time is manipulated through anti-trafficking work to (re)produce exclusionary politics of belonging.

This article addresses this lacuna, asking what political work is achieved when the promise of protection renders Beth's future unintelligible. This brings literature on the temporalities of belonging (Berlant 1997; Ramsay 2017) together with critiques of anti-trafficking's rescue politics (Hua 2011; Kempadoo 2015) to highlight the constitutive role of the timeless modern slave in ideas about Britishness. In so doing, I contribute to the field of international political sociology by capturing how subjectivity, belonging, race, and mobility interact within narratives of modern slavery. Doing this not only helps us to better understand the affective experiences of a hitherto under researched group (Segrave et al. 2017), but also to imagine an anti-trafficking response that takes these experiences into account.

In what follows, I begin by briefly discussing the temporal literature on mobility, belonging, race, and abolitionism, before interrogating the politics of British anti-modern slavery rhetoric and reflecting on methods. The second half of this paper returns to my conversation with Beth, exploring how infantilizing and criminalizing temporal processes positioned her as both desiring of, and threatening to, national life. This reveals the impossible promise of Britain's anti-modern slavery policy, which relies on and reproduces the "animated suspension" (Berlant 2011) of protection-seekers.

Temporalizing the Modern Slave

Warped temporalities are central to the experience of migration and protection-seeking (Bendixsen and Eriksen 2020; Mountz 2020; Jacobsen et al. 2021). Engendering disruptions or suspensions of time, the migratory experience is often viewed as a "waiting game" of chronic uncertainty (Griffiths 2014, 1991). Many migrants, like Beth, feel a spatio-temporal liminality, a temporal disjuncture between their future expectations and their temporary realities (Hynes 2011; Haas 2017), which exacerbates feelings of present and future insecurity (Drangsland 2020). It is this affective disjuncture and the ways in which it is produced by the state's bureaucratic temporal processes that this article seeks to unpack.

I do this by thinking about how states "steal time" (Bhatia and Canning 2021), instrumentalizing temporal technologies[4] to block, deter, or delay access to rights for "unwanted" migrants (Masoumi 2021; Isaac 2022). This categorizes and scripts the narratives of mobile populations in "simplistic and sanitized ways," obscuring the individual's own temporal construction (Gill 2009, 223). Problematizing what can become "lasting temporariness" (Oesch 2019) reveals tensions between the permanence of this subjectivity—indeed, its *designed* stasis—and its promised transiency. Ramsay (2017) sees this temporal control as a technique of sovereign power insofar as the perceived temporal liminality—or "different social tense" (2017, 534)—of refugee communities in Australia exposes them to excessive state intervention. For these communities, inclusion in political life demands compliance to the nation-

[4]Masoumi (2021) uses the term "temporal technologies" to describe the methods ad devices used to regulate and manipulate the temporal dimensions of state procedures. For example, the fast-tracking of refugee claims processing to expedite removals.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

state's "hegemonic future horizons" (ibid); as long as their ways of living are deemed "incompatible" or "incommensurable" with Australian life, they are denied the possibility of futurity even after resettlement. The state's control over time thus not only determines who can or cannot claim protection on Australian soil, but equally what it means to belong in Australia.

In this vein, the literature on belonging within international political sociology challenges the promise of shared national histories or future horizons through spatial, temporal, and embodied analysis (Anderson 1983; Yuval-Davis et al. 2006; Fisher 2012; May 2016a; Clarke 2023). For example, Anne McNevin (2020, 2022) sees time as "politically generative" (2020, 547) of the figure of the citizen, understood in opposition to migrants and other marginalized communities. These communities relate to the nation-state through a progressive and yet ever-suspended "temporal narrative of citizenship-to-come" (2020, 546), a "waiting room of citizenship" (Fortier 2021) in which full achievement is a promise always deferred. These expectations of citizenship are stabilized by problematic assumptions about race and time; racialized hierarchies of subjectivity construct certain bodies as "out of place" in and through time (Zehfuss and Vaughan-Williams 2024). In this context, ideas about, and access to, the future are manipulated to secure and circumscribe the national public. This highlights not only how ideas about mobility and belonging are constituted in/through time, but equally how time produces and reifies racial distinctions.

Whilst the metaphor of slavery often obscures how human trafficking relates to and overlaps with the experience of other mobile populations (Hodkinson et al. 2021), this paper attests that a similar future politics is at play. In the last 20 years, the dominant global approach to human exploitation has shifted. The language of trafficking has been replaced by "modern slavery" as a "unifying banner" under which to define offences stretching from slavery, servitude, and forced or compulsory labor, to human trafficking, sexual exploitation, the removal of organs, the securing of services by force, deception, or threat, and the securing of services from children or vulnerable people (Broad and Turnbull 2019, 122). A self-professed sector leader, the Modern Slavery Act 2015 amplified the symbolic power of Britain's anti-trafficking response, boasting an expanded policy frame and political and legislative scope. And yet, this has generated legal zones of indistinction within which the figure of the modern slave is both made and obfuscated. In particular, the relationship between (inter)national protection obligations and a national (anti)immigration agenda challenges the government's ability to both define and support the so-called modern slave (Jovanovic 2023). As a result, experiences of indeterminate temporariness have expanded and intensified.

This uncertain temporality is (re)produced through racist and colonial tropes of infantilization and criminalization. These processes of de- and re-subjectification are intimately shaped by Blackness (Breslow 2019), and compounded by immigration status, gender, and class (Harbisch 2023). Those seeking protection across borders are often portrayed at the "intersection of violence and childness" (Manea and Precup 2020, 481), deprived of the agency of adulthood whilst accompanied by the constant expectation of maturity and, in turn, threat (Canning 2019; Musso 2020). This dehumanizes "irregular" migrants, who are depersonalized across the political spectrum. This then naturalizes socio-political hierarchies based explicitly on geography and race (Shepherd 2024). As such, racialized subjects are generated through the manipulation of time, which circumscribes individual subjectivity.

In the context of human trafficking, this "double identification" as criminal/victim governs mobility through a strategic appeal to victims' suffering (Aradau 2004, 251). A victim's subjectivity is simultaneously tied to their sexed body and the perceived risk they pose to migration regimes. With this, the criminal violation of borders takes precedence, the victim's vulnerability a surrogate for the political community (Berman 2013). A "nexus of gendered and racialized innocence and

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

heinous crime" constructs this victim as female, young, white, and passive, both individualizing and seemingly naturalizing this criminal justice response (Berman 2013, 6). Bernstein (2010) thus locates anti-trafficking policies at the inter-section between "carceral feminism" and "militarized humanitarianism," whereby moralistic interventionism meets an incarceration agenda. This "sexual humanitarianism" is a "strategic vector of neo-liberalism" insofar as it justifies restrictive labor-migration policies, which reinforce racial and class-based hierarchies whilst absolving the international community of responsibility for conditions of exploitation (Mai 2018, 3). The "war against human trafficking" thus masks and/or worsens the structural and political–economic vulnerabilities associated with trafficking through intensified precarity (Kinney 2013, 100; Sharma 2005; Schwarz 2023).

This politics has precedent in the nineteenth century "myth of white slavery," which centered on the abduction of European woman for prostitution abroad (Doezema 2010). Then, as it is today, infantilized victimhood was reserved for the innocent White woman, whose non-consensual defilement became a cautionary tale for a threatened national body (also see Harrington 2010). In contrast, the sex worker was explicitly racialized as "the spectre of chaos, her inverted double, her consenting evil twin" (Doezema 2010, 720), criminalized for failing to meet the moral standards of "good" society. The future of the White slave was then redeemable only insofar as this spectral figure was external to the time-frame of anti-slavery work. This politics continues, masked by the universalization of human rights and its associated "neutral language of fact, description and statistics" (2010, 46), which perpetuate a racial order predicated on the inferiority of non-White societies. Drawing on the paternalistic urge to both control and care, these processes of infantilization and criminalization are "*two sides of the same colonial coin*" (Shepherd 2024, emphasis in original). The dynamics of coloniality rely upon concurrent narratives of rescue and repulsion to secure domination over colonial charges (Mayblin 2018). Whilst this infantilizing trope supported white supremacist justifications for the Transatlantic Slave Trade (Ford 2009), the associated ideology of benevolent paternalism was reproduced by its abolitionists (Quirk and Richardson 2009). This has been transposed into the present day to reaffirm the compassionate benevolence of the West vis-à-vis the Global South (Kempadoo 2015), relying on exaggerated racial stereotyping to elide how Western populations benefit from and often directly perpetrate exploitation (Gregoriou and Ras 2018).

This has temporal dimensions: a "*denial of coevalness*" (Fabian 2014, 31, emphasis in original) refuses the non-Western world "temporal coexistence with the West," leaving them "robbed of validity and laid bare for Western plunder" (Coetzee 2021, 466). This relegates non-Western bodies to fixed timelessness, sub-sumed into a single narrative of human progress (Bhabha 1991; Mignolo 2011). As such, Western-dominated political time mediates not only how we know world politics, but equally the diagnoses made about development, nationhood, civilization, and subjectivity (Hutchings 2008; Hom 2010). Temporality is thus "a dividing barometer of raciality" insofar as the seemingly cohesive, progressive political time of White society is unavailable to its Black inhabitants (Agathangelou and Killian 2016, 28). This is a legacy of the slave trade, as the experience of commodification informs how Black people are positioned and understood today (Hartman 1997). This presupposes the political and normative objectivity of the White and the West, a moralistic framing granting them further epistemic authority and political legitimacy.

The ordered linearity of "white time" thus systematically dispossesses Black populations of time, forcing them into a threshold position vis-à-vis normative understandings of humanity (Brendese 2023). The "temporal circularity of black time" (Warren 2018, 23)—embodied explicitly by the slave, but apparent across the Black experience—is a temporality "beyond time" (2018, 95), a tool with which to demonstrate and govern the freedom of white existence (Anderson et al. 2020; Stovall 2021). As such, insofar as Tapji Garba and Sara-Maria Sorentino (2020, 776) see

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

"the "immate-riality" and "a-spatiality" of the slave, its abstractness and metaphoricity" as its "*materiality and geography*" (emphasis in original), we could also see the (modern) slave's a-temporality *as its temporality*, essential yet unliveable within the construction of white time. White future, in this context, exists through the appropriation of Black possibilities.

This speaks to the temporality of neo-abolitionism and its erasure of the historical and structural conditions of racialized violence. Through the language and imagery of modern slavery, anti-trafficking campaigns repurpose the violence of slavery to reproduce, rather than challenge, white paternalism, white accumulation, and white comfort (Beutin 2017). These campaigns individualize the memory of slavery, circumscribing historical context and denying present-day structural violence. Black suffering is then supplanted by concurrent narratives of White female innocence and the backwardness of the Global South. This minimizes present-day white, patriarchal, capitalist complicity, enabling the recuperation of "evidence of state-sanctioned violence to tell a story of national progress and inclusion" (Beutin 2017, 17). The power of modern slavery as an analogy, then, lies partially in its ability to repackage the past to service the present.

And yet, it is also important to acknowledge the future politics of this analogy. Evocations of the Transatlantic Slave Trade historicize race relations into a progressive and future-oriented narrative in which the nation is a multicultural space of human rights and "national belonging [is] a universal aspiration" (Hua 2011, 95). This produces a universally available, yet largely unachievable, nationalist subjectivity:

> The mythologizing of the history of transatlantic slavery and its rewriting as a national aberration—an evil eventually corrected—rather than a constitutive moment enables a teleological story of inclusion told through multicultural frames that stress pluralism and postracial longings for a color-blind future (2011, 105).

Transcending national histories of extractive and exploitative social and labor relations, this logic is the "gift of abolition" for "slave-holding cultures" (Shilliam 2013, 144), who forgo accountability for past actions and present injustices by:

> Transform[ing] into freedom cultures. With no need for atonement over past actions, "humanitarian" ethics are firmly future-oriented, consisting mainly of the right to save the victims (especially women) of other cultures that it now indicts from on high as slave-holding (ibid.).

The narrative linearity of abolitionism, thus cements white supremacy, the generosity of Europeans seen as essential for the deliverance of emancipation, or the rupture in time between "the before-of-slavery and the afterwards-of-freedom" (Shilliam 2013, 142). In this paper, I draw on Beth's experiences to show how the seeming "generosity" of Britain's anti-modern slavery politics—and, by extension, national identity—functions by sustaining and suspending this narrative, the "afterwards-of-freedom" ever-present yet inaccessible for those with trafficking experience. In so doing, I speak to the British context and to a broader international politics of rescue, in which a temporal framework of liberal futurity both facilitates and obscures the past and present entrenchment of white supremacy.

The "Modern Slave" of British Future

The temporal pattern of coloniality has shaped Britain's anti-modern slavery landscape.[5] As the architect and sponsor of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, former Prime

[5]The Modern Slavery Act 2015 is part of a broader legislative landscape concerning the offences of exploitation and human trafficking. For example, the Sexual Offences Act 2003, the Asylum and Immigration Act 2004, the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2006, the Coroners and Justice Act 2009, the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, and the Illegal Migration Act 2023.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

Minister Theresa May framed Britain as "build[ing] a Great Britain that works for everyone and will not tolerate modern slavery" (Press Association 2016), invoking an image of Britian united under the collective ethical imperative to protect those affected by exploitation. This injects the national public sphere with moralistic promise, creating a narrative of national futurity through the idea of recovered human rights and a revitalized national identity. This reinforces what Berlant (1997, 36) terms the "iconicity of the national body," a hegemonic mode of collective identification which associates "Britishness" with the rescue of both the modern slave and British "greatness." This vision of progress has its roots in Enlightenment thinking—whereby the (false) promise of the equality of man ushered in the expectation of an idealized political environment (Hutchings 2008; Hom 2010)—and abolitionism, which, as discussed, removes modern slavery from contemporary debates on economics, politics, and immigration controls by framing it as an "old evil" to which the liberal development paradigm offers an antidote (O'Connell Davidson 2015, 5). Those subject to modern slavery, upon this view, can be identified and rescued by modern liberal states, whose development trajectories afford them moral superiority over "traditional" or "uncivilized" societies (O'Connell Davidson 2015, 11). This obscures the complicity of the British state and British citizens in enslavement, exploitation, and other systems of abuse.

This triumphalist narrative has historical precedent in the public memory of Britain's role in ending the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Early records of abolition—which, beginning in the 1780s, falteringly culminated in the Abolition Act of 1833—lauded the humanitarian efforts of British campaigners and politicians (Clarkson 1808; Oldfield 2007; Moody 2023). Despite later commentators drawing doubt upon parliament's true altruism (Brown 2006; Drescher 2011; Meadowcroft 2024) and its violently racialized silences (Hall 2018; Hirsch 2018), many popular accounts still highlight the abolition of slavery as "the expression of a distinctively British devotion to liberty and the rule of law" (Brown 2006, 5). This idealized vision of collective identity tied to individual freedoms, religious virtue, and political strength traversed time, sustaining anti-slavery advocacy into the contemporary moment (Quirk 2011); the moral capital accrued by nineteenth century abolition seemingly qualifies May's government to confront slavery's "modern" form. As such, May (2016b) labels modern slavery "the great human rights issue of our time," for:

> Just as it was Britain that took an historic stand to ban slavery two centuries ago, so Britain will once again lead the way in defeating modern slavery and preserving the freedoms and values that have defined our country for generations.

Here, May's reference to her predecessors' abolitionist efforts offers a neat and largely accepted historical narrative upon which she can make explanatory and normative judgments about "our times." By flattening history into an extended and shared "time" of abolition, May homogenizes exploitation (then and now), moulding a universalized culture of human rights (Hua 2011; 2018) within which Britain is duty-bound to impart its "freedoms" and "values." This leaves little room for critiquing the present; the British public sphere is taken as a space of inevitable futurity and progress.

This is reminiscent of Britain's role in the international discursive and legislative transition from "white slavery" to the "traffic in women and children" during the 1920s. By foregrounding intimate, familial responsibility rather than economic or political redress, trafficking was seen as "a thorny—but not terribly controversial or political—world problem" (Morefield 2020, 681). As such, logics of imperialism could be couched in an "explicitly post-imperial, liberal vernacular" (2020, 682), reconciled with liberal internationalism through the imagery of unwitting mothers, daughters, or sisters. This approach relied upon the vilification of both migration

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

and sex work. Ideas of British liberty were then bound to the purity of the nation's women and the moral future of the social order (Graham 2017).

The sustenance of these ideas within so-called "modern" abolitionist rhetoric—and its individualized criminal justice framework (McGrath and Watson 2018)—highlights the strategic continuity of paternalistic tropes across time (Kempadoo 2015). British neo-abolitionist work is instrumentalized as "a form of action imagined as lying beyond and outwith politics" (O'Connell Davidson 2015, 10) through which the state's benevolence can be realized and sustained unperturbed. Theresa May reinforced this in the Foreword to the UK's first Modern Slavery Strategy, stressing that:

> Young girls are raped, beaten, passed from abuser to abuser and sexually exploited for profit. Vulnerable men are tricked into long hours of hard labour before being locked away in cold sheds or rundown caravans. People are made to work in fields, in factories, and on fishing vessels. Women are forced into prostitution, and children systematically exploited (Great Britain. HM Government 2014, 5).

Describing young girls and children "systematically exploited" by traffickers and "slave drivers" (Great Britain. HM Government 2014, 6) normatively empowers the paternalistic state, negating serious reflection on its role in creating the conditions for slavery to thrive (Hodkinson et al. 2021). This framing inherently rejects inequalities within British society. Instead, it uses comparisons with the pre-political modern slave as a foil to flatten any British citizen's critiques of the state and its hierarchies.

As such, the modern slave embodies the "infantile citizen" (Berlant 1997, 6), a subject poised for belonging yet stripped of agency to enact it. Presented as a child or foetus, this pre-citizen anticipates rather than experiences politics. As such, they can be neither responsible for political culture, nor actively critical of the national present as they have no intellectual capacity nor independent thought to do so. Instead, they represent a "post-historical future" (Berlant 1997, 23) in which the crises of the present are substituted for an optimistic, decontextualized investment in the "patriot of tomorrow" (Berlant 1997, 49). Any critique of the state is thus pre-emptively ridiculed as either political interference from a belligerent actor or the product of an "uncivilized," "ungrateful," or anti-familial nature. The generational temporality of the family, instead, offers a logic of national futurity in which the incipient citizen can make ethical claims on the future—as long as they are in line with the paternal state's norms.

This is clear in this paper's epigraph, in which former Home Secretary Priti Patel lauds British "generosity" for supporting protection-seekers towards a "better future:"

> Behind each statistic lies the story of a person or a family who can look forward to a better future because of the generosity of the British people. We celebrate that (Great Britain. Home Office 2021a, 2).

In interpreting Britons as a singularly generous public body with the power to bestow time, Patel paints the public sphere as moralistic, individualistic, and progressive whilst stripping the modern slave of temporal and political agency. The British public then draws its identity, power, and political legitimacy from its potential to create different kinds of "new" and "better" time, which transcend the "fractures and hierarchies of national life" (Berlant 1997, 27). As Berlant (1997, 36) explains, identification with this transcendent national public relies on the seemingly "obvious" temporality of "normal personhood"—defined by Western-centric, neo-liberal ideas of sovereignty and progress—which conceals the incoherence and historical contingency of the body politic. From this, a "peculiar burden of national surrogacy" befalls the "subaltern body," who is stereotyped and frozen in time as representing either a *threat* to, or the *desire* for, citizenship. Through this de- and

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

re-subjectification, the "spectre of chaos"—race, sex, gender, and ethnicity—is located outside the idealized national time-frame, which is neutralized through the language of fairness (Doezema 2010, 46).

This mimics the relationship between abolition and the moralization of imperial projects after 1833; the abolition of slavery was accompanied by increased colonial dominance under the guise of freeing the African continent of the slave trade (Brantlinger 1986). This displaced blame for slavery, buttressing evolutionary doctrines of African inferiority. Imperialism was then justified on moral, religious, and scientific grounds (Fisher 2012). This sentiment informs comments from Patel's successor, Suella Braverman, when she described Britons as:

> famously a fair and patient people. But their sense of fair play has been tested beyond its limits as they have seen the country taken for a ride. Their patience has run out. The law-abiding patriotic majority have said, "Enough is enough." (HC Deb 7 March 2023, col. 153).

By speaking to and (ostensibly) with the British public, Braverman circumvents questions about the lawfulness and authority of her party (Jovanovic 2023) to construct a national body defined by its generosity rather than its exclusions. Braverman then commands temporal authority—"Enough is enough"—to discipline migrants for what she sees as their willful exploitation of the British public. This distinguishes between British citizens and subordinated others whilst absolving the "law abiding patriotic majority" of responsibility for exploitation.

This sets the scene for a "cultural struggle over the material and symbolic conditions" (Berlant 1997, 2) of the British public sphere, presenting Britain's sovereignty as sacred, intimate, and in need of protection from territorial, legal, and cultural interventions. Haunted by conjectures "of forlorn greatness in the absence of an empire once built upon transatlantic slavery and colonial oppression" (Gadd and Broad 2018, 1455), the public sphere becomes a private space, a "zone of trauma that demands political therapy" (Berlant 1997, 8). Recovery from this trauma requires optimism in the normative promise of national futurity. As such, the "anti-political politics of contemporary conservative culture" (Berlant 1997, 10) lives the future in and for the present, isolating any contradictory desires and anxieties related to national identity.

For David Gadd and Rose Broad (2018, 1442–3), this drives a rhetoric of "violent innocence," whereby the British state silences critique and displaces blame. This underpins Patel's uncritical association of asylum seekers with both national security threats and "child rapists:"

> Our generous safeguards for victims are being rampantly abused by child rapists, people who pose a threat to national security and failed asylum seekers with no right to be here (Great Britain. Home Office 2021b).

Here, broad swathes of border-crossers are simultaneously associated with private, criminal violence and Britain's loss of power, becoming an affront to British values, and a challenge to the very notion of "Britishness." Non-British "slave-masters" are seen to violate both individual sovereignty—here, the modern slave's right to a future—and the sovereignty of the state. This narrative is reinforced by "the deployment of analogies that represent the threat of imaginary violence to the natural body" (Berlant 1997, 41), the non-consensual defilement of the modern slave a cautionary tale for an endangered national body. The British state puts itself into a defensive position, arguing its own moral sacrifice in supporting trafficking victims, whilst further militarizing its borders and stigmatizing all other categories of migrant. However, in so doing, tensions intensify between the promise of anti-modern slavery politics and the promise of the national future; the conflation of "victims"

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

and "criminals" at the border racializes the idea of modern slavery and reinforces the assumption of a nation under threat.

By temporalizing this crisis as a story of national redemption, it can be reabsorbed into the national narrative of past and future glory. As such, British antislavery rhetoric enables a largely nationalist, racist, and xenophobic argument about Britain's imperiled future to be seen as culturally driven and moralistic. The "shared fantasy" of British excellence "keeps *core questions of power, paradox and contradiction* at the heart of British nationalism at bay" (Gadd and Broad 2018, 1443–4, emphasis in original). In this fantasy, the subjectivities of victim and criminal are frozen in time as representing either the *desire for*, or a *threat to*, the national future. In the rest of this paper, I will explore how these subjectivities are lived and reproduced. First, I show how Beth was stripped of subjectivity through the suspension of her time. I then detail how Beth's time was appropriated to justify institutionalized responses to trafficking. Finally, I discuss how this circumscribed her future possibilities, contributing "cruelly" to a racialized national future (Berlant 2011, 6).

Methodology

My interview with Beth was part of a research project on women's experiences of protection after trafficking. Responding to the dearth of lived experience research in this area (Bosworth et al. 2011; Segrave et al. 2017), I aimed to gain an in-depth, personalized insight into their lives and meaning-making processes. This feminist approach uses "thick descriptions" to explore intricate lives and produce reflexive knowledge (McNamara 2009; Rayaprol 2016) and prioritizes trauma-informed research (Hopper 2017; Middleton and McDonald 2020). Importantly, I do not profess to make generalizable conclusions about the experience of women in post-trafficking situations in Britain. Doing so would belie the variations in histories, nationalities, races, classes, and time-and-place-based contextualities. Rather, a small sample size allowed me to understand individual women's sense-making, using this to glean insight into the varied ways that temporalities are imagined and encountered in Britain. In this vein, the rest of this article concentrates on Beth's experiences alone.

To negotiate access, I built relationships with UK organizations providing support to women with trafficking experience. By limiting my interviewees to women known to these organizations, I remained true to the pillars of trauma informed practice, ensuring as far as possible that participants had safe, supportive, and trusting networks (Hopper 2017). Nonetheless, this sampling decision had several potential negative ethical implications. First, I could have inadvertently produced a skewed interpretation of the post-trafficking landscape, as the extent of human trafficking in the UK far exceeds those accessing formal support. However, as I was interested in the relationship between the modern slave and the state, this was not necessarily prohibitive. Second, working closely with support services may have impeded participants' autonomous decision-making (Halse and Honey 2005; McAreavey and Das 2013). However, in the sensitive and highly guarded context of anti-trafficking, the involvement of caseworkers was a necessary and valuable compromise.

I also attempted to minimize the potential harms associated with the research process by asking participants to choose their pseudonym and offering unconditional editorial control of transcripts (Burgess-Proctor 2015). Interviews were held online, which enabled participants' control over their length and setting, reduced the pressure of my physical presence, offered greater privacy, and enhanced internal confidentiality (Trier-Bieniek 2012; Weller 2017). Although there are risks associated with virtual research—requiring reflection on power, safety, and digital literacy—caseworker engagement helped to navigate these concerns. Finally, the interviews were semi-structured and followed a relational and strengths-based approach. This

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

centers on participants' strengths, capacities, and support systems, with no requirements for disclosure (Kelly and Gates 2010; Hopper 2017).

Suspending and Re-Scripting Time

> *But it was a loooong wait, waiting period, and that alone can drive you mad, if you're not already going cuckoo.*

As Beth illustrates above, waiting for decisions regarding her legal status drove her "*cuckoo*," the indeterminacy of this process having a damaging impact on her psychological well-being. These periods of suspended time—of waiting and associated bureaucratic confusion—both set the context for her personal sense-making and enabled a process of political de-subjectification and de-temporalization, rendering her embodied self and personal time-frame institutionally unintelligible and open to manipulation by bureaucratic actors.

Beth explained feeling suspended as she navigated the UK's framework for identifying and supporting people experiencing trafficking, the NRM, alongside the asylum and criminal justice systems. After transitioning out of NRM support—following what was then a 14-day "recovery and reflection" period[6]—she left her accommodation waiting for her asylum decision and progress on her criminal case, without access to the social safety nets of the safe house:

> *When I moved back to London, for over, nearly, for over a year I didn't have no support. And then you're there, waiting for a decision that seemed never to come, you know, like, the fear of this… OK, now, I've left my aunty, I've reported this, I don't know whether I can stay in the country, what do I do?*

During this period, Beth describes how her spatial ambiguity—she knew not whether she could stay in the UK—was matched by temporal uncertainty, for her imagined future was unsettled. She experienced the frustrating slowing down of time; she was "*waiting for a decision that seemed never to come.*" Here, Beth's time spirals as she questions the utility of the available support mechanisms. The discontinuity produced by the ending of Beth's "recovery and reflection" period and this extended waiting disrupted her forward momentum.

A bureaucratic disconnect between the NRM and the asylum system contributed to this temporal stickiness. Below, Beth explains her confusion when, despite an accepted modern slavery claim, her asylum case was rejected:

> *The asylum system, Jesus, it's terrible. Like, its… it's TE-RRI-BLE. That's the only word that comes to mind. It's… OK, it worked out at the end, but the process was not helpful. Imagine – because obviously they will decide whether or not you're gonna stay. Conclusive ground. Even though I got a positive conclusive grounds, they still tell me no, go back home.*

The inconsistencies felt here are not uncommon; each woman to whom I spoke during this project detailed an experience of negotiating conflicting systems. Politically, the relationship between immigration and modern slavery policy has drawn widespread criticism (Jovanovic 2023). Despite the anti-slavery sector calling for 12 months immigration leave for those under NRM protection (British Red Cross et al. 2019) access to refugee status and Discretionary Leave to Remain have been severely eroded (Garbers 2021). In Beth's case, this was a huge factor contributing to her feelings of suspension and lost futurity.

[6] 2017 NRM reforms extended the period of support available to recipients of positive conclusive grounds decisions from 14 to 45 days. This took the total period of support up to at least 90 days, with the extension of post-conclusive grounds support intended to create a smoother transition out of care. The 45-day cut-off, however, has been criticized in practice for creating a "cliff edge drop," leaving survivors with little opportunity to sustainably rebuild their lives (Matrix Chambers 2019).

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

Beth re-encountered these contradictory bureaucratic practices when pressing charges against her "*aunty*," who had subjected her to domestic servitude in both Nigeria and the UK:

> *I remember talking to the police, they were like "well?" Because one of the points we were trying to prove was that at least the NRM recognised me as someone who has been trafficked. But they were like "well, our investigation had nothing to do with that."*

[. . .]

> *Like, "well, yeah, that's the Home Office, they"ve said you were trafficked, but we don't'… it's almost like "we don't believe that you are, we are not sure that you are", that kind of a thing.*

[. . .]

> *whatever the police did, the Home Office would paraphrase it and do it another way, you know what I mean? It was always like that.*

The recurrent time of this process—"*it was always like that*"—wore down her trust in the system to provide her with "purpose, fairness, or progression" (Griffiths 2014, 1997). Instead, she felt that her subjectivity was discounted:

> *I just feel like everybody was just using me, playing me like a ball. Bounce me here, bounce me there, bounce me here, bounce me… but forgetting that, OK, this ball might, if you bounce it this way, it might, a nail might punch the ball. You know what I mean? I think, in the midst of it all, of you waiting to be heard, and of people just… treating you as though you don't matter, you know, they forget there are other things that could punch you, that could bust you, that could bruise you just by their action.*

In likening herself to a "*ball*," Beth illustrates the de-humanizing effect of temporal stasis. In this passage, Beth imagines her subjectivity as indefinitely suspended, her humanity forgotten as she is treated as inanimate and worthless. Her anticipation of being "*punched*," "*bust*," and "*bruised*" during this time is indicative of her fear of an uncertain and dislocated future. She takes this further by highlighting the disconnect between individual and institutional perceptions of security: "*they forget there are other things that could punch you.*"

Tellingly, Beth describes learning of her asylum refusal as being beaten and frozen:

> *that was a big punch in my belly, when they said no. I don't know, it's like… the only way I can explain, it's like, you know, I think there was one time they were doing, um, a few years ago, ice bucket challenge? Imagine ice water being poured on you, like, that's the only way I could just explain… I was just numb. You punch me, now you pour ice water on me from head to toe!*

This analogy of ice water represents both a sharp, corporeal articulation of Beth's fear and an abrupt suspension of her temporality. Through encounters with the NRM, immigration, and criminal justice systems, she was relegated to non-subjectivity, "*forgotten*" amidst bureaucratic competition. With this, as I will show in the next section, she could be institutionally re-figured.

"Listened to" but Not "Heard"

Whilst Beth was stripped of subjectivity through the temporal ambiguities of the protection-seeking process, her time-line was re-scripted by institutional officials to construct a subject that could be simultaneously rescued and rejected. Concurrent infantilization and criminalization occurred as Beth was "*listened to*" but not "*heard*," her time-frame manipulated to fit institutional narratives. This appropriation of her embodied time enabled her relational (re)subjectification as desiring of, or threatening to, the British public.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

Engaging with support services, Beth was frequently positioned as temporally prior to national life: infantile, sexualized, and recoverable through pathological rather than political intervention. We see this in Beth's description of accessing NRM mental health support; her the therapist misrepresented her experience as rape:

> *I was given this, um, therapist I was seeing, but, bless her, I didn't feel that she, um… I felt she saw the illness before she saw me. You know what I mean? Her focus was on the illness and not the person. I mean, if you really wanna help, uh, someone, you need to know who they are, you know what I mean? Then you can ascertain how best you can support that person. I felt she didn't – it got to a point that she was treating me like I was a victim of rape.*

Here, Beth's subjectivity is reduced to a narrow, sexualized understanding of the "modern slave" (Andrijasevic 2007), located on a depoliticized, medicalized time-frame. The temporal dissonance this produced vis-à-vis Beth's everyday life made her see therapy as essentially meaningless:

> *It's one thing to have a therapist just sit there, you talk to – I remember the therapist I had I would just sit and talk, talk, talk like this, and they might just say "hmm"… and I am thinking "why are you nodding your head so much?!" It doesn't mean anything, you know what I mean? Like, urgh, God, I remember, like, when I had to go, I think it was like once a week, when I had to go, I was like… I didn't wanna go.*

As such, the scheduling of weekly sessions disrupted the tempo of Beth's daily life and inhibited her from (re)claiming control over her future. She felt that she "*can't say no*," the prescriptive structuring of her support doing little to overcome the powerlessness she felt during her trafficking experience:

> *But obviously, I can't say no. I go. Back then I didn't know that, if you say… because what has happened, everything I am told to do, I have to do it, so that, I carried that, you know, with me. I can't say no.*

This temporal appropriation was reinforced by the asylum interview process, where Beth says officials were preoccupied with documenting her body language. This separated Beth's body from its social and temporal context, ultimately counting for more than her personal narrative. Her interviewer used this to command the narrative frame:

> *I remember when – "cause they will send you the questions that was asked of you that day to your lawyer – and I remember just reading one part that says, um, even your body movement is documented. You know? If you are scared, they write it down, if you are shaking… there was one, they asked me a question, I was shaking, I didn't even remember being shaking out, apparently I was shivering all of a sudden, like, the women recorded there was so much fear in her eyes, that was the way she worded, basically saying I was fearful, I looked fearful at that time, you know? So, everything is documented, then this person is reading it. You are reading what I said, right, you"re listening to what I have said, but have you heard what I am saying?*

By not "*hearing*" Beth and using their impressions to describe her as "*fearful*"—something she does not remember feeling—the asylum decision-makers infantilized her as passive, powerless, and vulnerable. As such, they were able to confuse and re-order her time to justify her rejection. Below, Beth explains how she was expected to have reported her trafficker before the abuse had begun:

> *I remember sitting down with her and I was just reading for myself, and I saw and I'm like "what?! How did they expect me to do that?!" Like even me, I couldn't say, like, who made this decision clearly, like, first of all I came here when I was – OK, let's go by the passport month of birth, the month of birth on passport, August – 14, right. How do you expect a 14-year-old to know who the government are?!*

[. . .]

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

How do you expect me to go to the police? What has happened hasn't happened yet.

This judgment simultaneously infantilized her—denying her the sequential time (and power) of maturation—and criminalized her—depriving her of the innocence and protective confines of childhood as she is punished for failing to report her "*aunty*" as a teenager.

By giving Beth the "*air of an adult*," then, she could be re-packaged as a potential criminal. This missed "*a big chunk of* [her] *life*," denying Beth the ability to claim authority over her time:

> [P]*robably because I reported when I was an adult, I was 27 when I came out of it, I finally had the courage to come out of it, so because I am an adult I think they are looking at me with the air of an adult, "you are an adult, like, you should know this," that kind of a thing. I don't know it! You're forgetting that by, OK, she's an adult now, but what transpired between this age, say she came in between this, and where she is now, you're missing a big chunk of my life! I didn't have control of nothing back then! So, you've not… I was so mad that day! What, it's like, you're now blaming me?!*

This inability to connect Beth's adulthood with her exploited childhood highlights a violent co-optation of her temporality. Despite being infantilized into the subjectivity of the modern slave, Beth is ultimately positioned as outside of, and threatening to, the national time-frame: "*you're now blaming me?!*" This allows for the restructuring of Beth's relationship to Britain, constructing a subjectivity that can support both Britain's safeguarding and immigration agendas.

Ambiguous Futures

In the above scenarios, the dispossession and appropriation of Beth's time produced a subject upon which power could be exerted: a rape victim, a failed asylum seeker, a criminal. This de- and re-subjectification relied on Beth's experiences appearing unintelligible, disembodied, or temporally confused. In so doing, the state's anti-modern slavery apparatus located her outside of, and yet in relation to, hegemonic national time. This left her in an "animated suspension" (Berlant 2011, 6), poised between futures of acceptance or rejection:

> *I belong to this country, but do you really belong to the country? You know what I mean? Like, this… having the… passport or the document, yes it gives you that stand, you know, I can stand on my two feet in this country. But it doesn't mean you belong to the country, because tomorrow, you go and commit a crime, and they kick you out. It is something that they can strip away from you. Really. So, it's… so… I can't answer that I belong to this country. Yes, I have a sense of belonging like, ok, I'm here, I'm in education, I'm studying what I want, I'm able to go out freely, because they gave me the travel document now so that means I can travel to… uh… a sunny country and get some vitamin D – which they lack in this country, but we're not talking about that! We need to have a conversation about that! – you know, yes, in that sense, I can say, yeah, I do belong. But do I really belong? I don't. You never do. Because it is something, like, they give it to you, right, but then it's like, you have it, they won't tell you this, but you better watch your step. They'll take it away. Do you know what I mean? It can easily be taken away from you. Like, OK, here… I belong in this country, but I am only belonging for five years. Because after five years, you are… and then what? You can renew, but they might take forever to get back to you, Home Office being the… being the annoying people they are! Like, they are annoying, I tell you! It's just for five years, so I can't really say… I don't wanna attach to it, attach myself and say, yes, I belong here.*

Rather than an unfortunate side effect of overlapping institutional approaches, Beth's circumscribed inclusion is central to Britain's modern slavery response. By simultaneously embodying temporal subjectivities of *not yet* and *not ever*, she retains the promise of liberalized abolitionism whilst demonstrating the state's tough stance on immigration. In this vein, Beth explains how she was ever poised to lose the priv-

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

ileges of "*belonging*;" despite holding identification with which she could "*stand on* [her] *own two feet in this country*," she is conscious that these can be easily "*strip*[ped] *away*" and governs her behavior accordingly. As before, Beth's feelings of insecure attachment are heightened by bureaucracy. Although identified as a modern slave and thus entitled to the fabled "better" British future, then, Beth is suspended in the present tense, cushioned from the possibility of belonging by her inability to fully assimilate into the national body. Instead, her temporality is circumscribed; Beth "*belongs*" only so far as she threatens or desires the nation, upholding a narrative of Britain as both a generous benefactor of liberal freedoms and an immigration enforcer.

Beth's experience speaks to Berlant's (2011) notion of "cruel optimism," the idea that an optimistic attachment to the possibility of "the good life"—or, as we see it here, the national promise—can actively impede affective flourishing. As a structure of temporal and affective relationality, optimism is a negotiated attachment to the idea of a future "good life." This optimism is cruel, however, when the precarity of the present disrupts one's access to this goal; "What happens to optimism when futurity splinters as a prop for getting through life?" (Berlant 2011, 19). The present, Berlant explains, is then perceived as "an impasse shaped by crisis," the affective mediation of emerging situations in an "extended now," or an "animated suspension" (Berlant 2011, 5–8).

This impasse is a product of Beth's intersecting subjectivities of modern slave, migrant, and Black woman in the UK. Britain's so-called "reckoning" with race—following the 2020 death of George Floyd and the subsequent international resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement—involved recognizing and addressing the intimate and political violence of abstracted notions of "normal" personhood, which cater to only the most reduced, white, patriarchal, and heteronormative notion of citizenship (Webber 2022). This reckoning has, however, largely not materialized; a government-commissioned report whitewashed racial injustice and denied institutional racism (Landler and Castle 2021). The racialization of British policing is a point of particular contention, with Black people in Britain reporting widespread mistrust and fear of the police (Nijjar 2022). Beth reiterates this distrust, stating that "*the way you are handled*" by the police "*depends on your race*:"

> *Yes, race plays… the way you are handled depends on your race. "Cause I remember someone saying, my lawyer just saying to me, "I'm just gonna be blunt with you, I"m just gonna be honest with you, the only reason why it is taking so long is because you are Black. If you were white, they would respond quicker.'*

Beth's lawyer's comments highlight how subjectivity and temporality work in concert to reproduce animated suspension. As long as her race positions Beth as the "spectre" against which the modern slave's future freedoms are understood and granted (Doezema 2010, 720), temporality is mobilized to embed hierarchies of embodied victimhood within Britain's anti-trafficking response: "*if you were white, they would respond quicker*." She thus feels the "burden of national surrogacy" (Berlant 1997, 36), representing the threshold of national benevolence and, with it, the political community.

With this, Beth challenges the apolitical moralism of Britain's neo-abolitionist narrative, questioning whether "*slavery has ended*" as the cultural structures of racial domination continue to determine who and how people can access the national public:

> *So, when you hear things like that, it's a reminder that we don't belong here. We don't belong here, know what I mean? Though I have no experience of police brutality in any way, I am not gonna say I understand how it feels – to some degree I do, I experienced it with them differently – but when you hear things like that, when you see that, when you see the… the Floyd, you know, knee to the neck, it's a reminder, you never belong. Do you know what I mean? And that, to me,*

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

> *is painful. And that, to me, for that to still continue at this day and age that we are in now, when they were talking about "slavery has ended," this is all part of it. It's all part of it. And that… it still matters that you don't belong. So, in that sense, I can't say that I belong to the country. I am… settled in this country, I am. But, for real… I don't know.*

By distinguishing between "*settled*" and "*belonging*," Beth reveals the cruel optimism of British anti-modern slavery policy: in seeking and obtaining nominal protection, her capacity to imagine a future and configure a sustainable present became more uncertain. Britain's human trafficking response is therefore reliant upon confusing the present with an obscure and moralized future, concealing violent practices in "*this day and age*," which circumscribe, appropriate, and externalize the temporal subjectivities of non-White, non-British people. The promised future of anti-modern slavery politics attempts to mask these violence by locating the modern slave in the pre-political, or extra-political spheres. And yet, this is an imperfect and cruel solution, for this temporal domination involves their continuous animated suspension.

Whilst Beth's experiences illuminate the specific temporal politics animating Britain's anti-modern slavery approach, these findings have broader implications for understanding the relationship between race, time, mobility, and belonging within and beyond the British context. In particular, Beth's circumscribed inclusion highlights how humanitarian logics construct and reproduce temporal subjectivities of *not yet* and *not ever* to delimit access to society. Not only does this curtail cross-border mobility—we have seen how restrictive border regimes go hand in hand with moralized protection rhetoric—but it also regulates internal borders through the inaccessibility of time. By contrasting the expectation that "*slavery has ended*" with fears of racial violence and police discrimination, Beth uses her temporal dissonance to highlight the difficulties that Black and Brown Britons face in conceiving secure futures. This is substantiated by recent political and legislative moves, such as the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, which make it easier for the Home Secretary to deprive British people of their citizenship should they hold dual citizenship (Garbers 2021). A future trajectory of this research could thus examine how time operates within the context of the racialization (and gendering) of citizenship.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have used my conversation with Beth to problematize the promise of anti-modern slavery politics in Britain. I have shown how the figure of the modern slave animates normative understandings of "Britishness," supporting a promised revitalization of British national identity as moralistic, sentimental, and abstracted from everyday political realities. References to nineteenth century abolitionism reinforce this narrative, firmly projecting an optimistic vision of a future British public sphere, which has "once again" emerged victorious over the evils of exploitation—always externalized, despite the British state's own participation and profit from slavery and exploitative labor. This is strengthened by the idea of threatened sovereignty; Theresa May's (2016a) pledge to "preserve" and safeguard British "freedoms" and "values" is complemented by the nation's campaign to "regain" control of its borders. This relies on the imagined figure of the modern slave, whose anticipated recovery symbolizes a conservative national future and a return to perceived moral supremacy.

Yet, these promises of protection and generosity are self-serving, ignoring the required framing of the modern slave as passive and child-like in exchange for the boost in rhetorical nationalist power. As Berlant's (1997) analysis of the "infantile citizen" demonstrates, this figure only retains power and salience precisely because it is unlived, has yet to establish a political trajectory, and is therefore unsullied by identity politics. This holds the modern slave in a state of animated suspension, their

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

desired future inclusion the intimate justification upon which to secure territorial and cultural borders in the present. And yet, this politics is haunted by embodied identity; the racial politics of citizenship is bracketed away by the synchronized criminalization of border-crossers and demonization of traffickers. This inclusion through exclusion—in which these individuals are understood as a threat to the nation—reaffirms the national future.

Beth's experiences of temporal de- and re-subjectification further complicate this narrative by highlighting how infantilization and criminalization are lived concurrently. Through her encounters with Britain's protection apparatus, she is positioned as simultaneously prior to and outside of the national time-frame, a subject against which political power can be exerted. This is influenced not only by her exploitation and nationality, but also by her status as a Black woman in Britain. For Beth, these temporal manipulations reveal the inherent complication of translating "*settled*" into subjectivity within the national context of British anti-modern slavery politics. She illustrates this by emphasizing the temporal dissonance between her promised future—"*I belong in this country*"—and her felt temporariness—"*but do I really belong*?"

Acknowledgments

Thanks go, as always, to Luise Bendfeldt, Hannah Richards, Louise Ridden, and Margot Tudor for reading and commenting on every version of this.

Funding

This research benefited from the support of an Economic and Social Research Council South West Doctoral Training Partnership 1 + 3 Studentship.

References

Ana M. Agathangelou and Kyle Killian. eds. 2016. *Time, Temporality and Violence in International Relations: (De)fatalizing the Present, Forging Radical Alternatives*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315883700

Anderson, Ben, Kevin Grove, Lauren Rickards, and Matthew Kearnes. 2020. "Slow Emergencies: Temporality and the Racialized Biopolitics of Emergency Governance." *Progress in Human Geography* 44: 621–39. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132519849263

Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

Andrijasevic, Rutvica. 2007. "Beautiful Dead Bodies: Gender, Migration and Representation in Anti-Trafficking Campaigns." *Feminist Review* 86: 24–44. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.fr.9400355

Aradau, Claudia. 2004. "The Perverse Politics of Four-Letter Words: Risk and Pity in the Securitisation of Human Trafficking." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 33 251–77. https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298040330020101

Bendixsen, Synnøve, and Thomas Hylland Eriksen. 2020. "Time and the Other: Waiting and Hope among Irregular Migrants." In *Ethnographies of Waiting: Doubt, Hope and Uncertainty*, edited by Manpreet K. Janeja and Andreas Bandak, 87–112. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003085317-4

Berlant, Lauren. 1997. *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*. Durham: Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv120qtf2

Berlant, Lauren. 2011. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822394716

Berman, Jacquline. 2013. "(Un)Popular Strangers and Crises (Un)Bounded: Discourses of Sex-Trafficking, the European Political Community and the Panicked State of the Modern State." In *Human Trafficking*, edited by Marie Segrave, 3–52. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315252940

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

Bernstein, Elizabeth. 2010. “Militarized Humanitarianism Meets Carceral Feminism: The Politics of Sex, Rights, and Freedom in Contemporary Antitrafficking Campaigns.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 36 45–71. https://doi.org/10.1086/652918

Beutin, Lyndsey P. 2017. “Black Suffering for/from Anti-Trafficking Advocacy.” *Anti-Trafficking Review*, 9, 14–30. https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.20121792.

Bhabha, Homi K. 1991. “‘Race’, Time and the Revision of Modernity.” *Oxford Literary Review* 13: 193–219. https://doi.org/10.3366/olr.1991.009

Monish Bhatia and Victoria Canning. eds. 2021. *Stealing Time: Migration, Temporalities and State Violence*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-69897-3

Bosworth, Mary, Carolyn Hoyle, and Michelle Madden Dempsey. 2011. “Researching Trafficked Women: On Institutional Resistance and the Limits to Feminist Reflexivity.” *Qualitative Inquiry* 17 769–79. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800411423192

Brantlinger, Patrick. 1986. “Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent.” In *Race, Writing, and Difference*, edited by Henry Louis Gates, 185–222. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Brendese, P.J. 2023. *Segregated Time*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Breslow, Jacob. 2019. “Adolescent Citizenship, or Temporality and the Negation of Black Childhood in Two Eras.” *American Quarterly* 71: 473–94. https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2019.0039

British Red Cross, Ashiana, and Hestia. 2019. “Hope for the Future: Support for Survivors of Trafficking after the National Referral Mechanism.” London. https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/we-speak-up-for-change/human-trafficking-and-slavery/after-the-national-referral-mechanism-report. Date accessed 24 February 2025.

Broad, Rose, and Nick Turnbull. 2019. “From Human Trafficking to Modern Slavery: The Development of Anti-Trafficking Policy in the UK.” *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 25: 119–33. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10610-018-9375-4

Brown, Christopher Leslie. 2006. *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Burgess-Proctor, Amanda. 2015. “Methodological and Ethical Issues in Feminist Research with Abused Women: Reflections on Participants’ vulnerability and Empowerment.” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 48: 124–34. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2014.10.014

Canning, Victoria. 2019. “Abject Asylum: Degradation and the Deliberate Infliction of Harm against Refugees in Britain.” *Justice, Power and Resistance* 3: 37–60.

Clarke, Amy. 2023. “Recognising British Bodies: The Significance of Race and Whiteness in ‘Post-Racial’ Britain.” *Sociological Research Online* 28: 279–95. https://doi.org/10.1177/13607804211032232

Clarkson, Thomas. 1808. *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament*. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme.

Coetzee, Azille. 2021. “Woman, Time and the Incommunicability of Non-Western Worlds: Understanding the Role of Gender in the Colonial Denial of Coevalness.” *Feminist Theory* 22: 465–82. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700120987391

Council of Europe. 2005. *Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings*. CETS No. 197. Strasbourg.

Davies, Julio D’Angelo, Julia O’Connell Davidson, and Ana Paula Da Silva. 2024. “Making Progress: ‘Sex Trafficking’, Sex Work, Temporality, and IM/Mobility.” *Sociological Research Online* 0. https://doi.org/10.1177/13607804241275268

Deb, HC. 2023. “Illegal Migration Bill.” UK: UK Parliamentary. Vol. 729. https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-03-07/debates/87B621A3-050D-4B27-A655-2EDD4AAE6481/IllegalMigrationBill#:~:text=This%20Bill%20enables%20the%20detention,appeals%20that%20can%20suspend%20removal. Date accessed 22 February 2025.

Doezema, Jo. 2010. *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters: The Construction of Trafficking*. London: Zed Books. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350222502

Drangsland, Kari Anne K. 2020. “Waiting as a Redemptive state: The ‘Lampedusa in Hamburg’ and the Offer from the Hamburg Government.” *Time & Society* 29: 318–39

Drescher, Seymour. 2011. “Anti-Slavery Debates: Tides of Historiography in Slavery and Anti-Slavery.” *European Review* 19: 131–48. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798710000396

Fabian, Johannes. 2014. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press. https://doi.org/10.7312/fabi16926

Fisher, Tracy. 2012. *What’s Left of Blackness: Feminisms, Transracial Solidarities, and the Politics of Belonging in Britain*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ford, Lacy K. 2009. *Deliver Us from Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South*. New York: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195118094.001.0001

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

FORTIER, ANNE-MARIE. 2021. *Uncertain Citizenship: Life in the Waiting Room.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

GADD, DAVID, AND ROSE BROAD. 2018. "Troubling Recognitions in British Responses to Modern Slavery." *The British Journal of Criminology* 58: 1440–61. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azx082

GARBA, TAPJI, AND SARA-MARIA SORENTINO. 2020. "Slavery is a Metaphor: A Critical Commentary on Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's 'Decolonization is Not a Metaphor.'" *Antipode* 52: 764–82. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12615

GARBERS, KATE. 2021. "Nationality and Borders Bill Part 4: Modern Slavery, Consideration Paper." Nottingham: University of Nottingham Rights Lab. https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/beacons-of-excellence/rights-lab/resources/reports-and-briefings/2021/october/consideration-paper-nationality-and-borders-bill.pdf. Date accessed 22 February 2025.

GILL, NICHOLAS. 2009. "Governmental Mobility: The Power Effects of the Movement of Detained Asylum Seekers around Britain's Detention Estate." *Political Geography* 28: 186–96. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2009.05.003

GRAHAM, LAURA. 2017. "Governing Sex Work through Crime: Creating the Context for Violence and Exploitation." *The Journal of Criminal Law* 81: 201–16. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022018317702802

GREAT BRITAIN. HM GOVERNMENT. 2014. "Modern Slavery Strategy." https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7e460340f0b6230268a4b1/Modern_Slavery_Strategy_FINAL_DEC2015.pdf. Date accessed 27 May 2025.

GREAT BRITAIN. HOME OFFICE. 2019. "Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act 2015: Final Report." https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/803406/Independent_review_of_the_Modern_Slavery_Act_-_final_report.pdf. Date accessed 20 October 2021.

GREAT BRITAIN. HOME OFFICE. 2021a. "New Plan for Immigration: Policy Statement." https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/972517/CCS207_CCS0820091708-001_Sovereign_Borders_Web_Accessible.pdf. Date accessed 24 February 2025.

GREAT BRITAIN. HOME OFFICE. 2021b. "Press Release: Alarming Rise of Abuse within Modern Slavery System." https://www.gov.uk/government/news/alarming-rise-of-abuse-within-modern-slavery-system. Date accessed 24 February 2025.

GREGORIOU, CHRISTIANA, AND ISLE A. RAS. 2018. "'Call for Purge on the People Traffickers': An Investigation into British Newspapers' Representation of Transnational Human Trafficking, 2000–2016." In *Representations of Transnational Human Trafficking: Present-day News Media, True Crime, and Fiction*, edited by Christiana Gregoriou, 25–60. Cham: Palgrave Pivot.

GRIFFITHS, MELANIE. 2014. "Out of Time: The Temporal Uncertainties of Refused Asylum Seekers and Immigration Detainees." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 40: 1991–2009. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2014.907737

HAAS, BRIDGET M. 2017. "Citizens-in-Waiting, Deportees-in-Waiting: Power, Temporality, and Suffering in the U.S. Asylum System." *Ethos* 45: 75–97. https://doi.org/10.1111/etho.12150

HALL, CATHERINE. 2018. "Doing Reparatory History: Bringing 'Race' and Slavery Home." *Race & Class* 60: 3–21

HALSE, CHRISTINE, AND ANNE HONEY. 2005. "Unravelling Ethics: Illuminating the Moral Dilemmas of Research Ethics." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30: 2141–62. https://doi.org/10.1086/428419

HARBISCH, AMELIE. 2023. "Children or Productive Adults? Infantilisation and Exploitation of Refugees in Germany and Austria." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50: 1590–608. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2166908

HARRINGTON, CAROL. 2010. *Politicization of Sexual Violence: From Abolitionism to Peacekeeping.* London: Routledge.

HARTMAN, SAIDIYA. 1997. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

HIRSCH, AFUA. 2018. *Brit(ish): On Race, Identity and Belonging.* London: Penguin Books.

HODKINSON, STUART N., HANNAH LEWIS, LOUISE WAITE, AND PETER DWYER. 2021. "Fighting or Fuelling Forced Labour? The Modern Slavery Act 2015, Irregular Migrants and the Vulnerabilising Role of the UK's Hostile Environment." *Critical Social Policy* 41: 68–90. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018320904311

HOM, ANDREW R. 2010. "Hegemonic Metronome: The Ascendancy of Western Standard Time." *Review of International Studies* 36: 1145–70. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001166

HOPPER, ELIZABETH K. 2017. "Trauma-Informed Psychological Assessment of Human Trafficking Survivors." *Women & Therapy* 40: 12–30. https://www.doi.org/10.1080/02703149.2016.1205905

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

Hua, Julietta. 2011. *Trafficking Women's Human Rights*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press. https://doi.org/10.5749/minnesota/9780816675609.001.0001

Hua, Julietta. 2018. "Modern-Day Slavery." In *Panic, Transnational Cultural Studies, and the Affective Contours of Power*, edited by Micol Seigel, 244–63. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351054744

Hutchings, Kimberly. 2008. *Time and World politics: Thinking the present*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. https://doi.org/10.7228/manchester/9780719073021.001.0001

Hynes, Patricia. 2011. *The Dispersal and Social Exclusion of Asylum Seekers: Between Liminality and Belonging*. Bristol: Bristol University Press. https://doi.org/10.46692/9781847423276

Isaac, Sarah Philipson. 2022. "Temporal Dispossession through Migration Bureaucracy: On Waiting within the Asylum Process in Sweden." *European Journal of Social Work* 25: 945–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2022.2077317

Jacobsen, Christine M., Marry-Anne Karlsen, and Shahram Khosravi. 2021. *Waiting and the Temporalities of Irregular Migration*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429351730

Jovanovic, Marija. 2023. "Legal Analysis of the Illegal Migration Bill 262 2022-23–Clauses 21-28 (Modern Slavery)." Essex Law Research Blog. https://essexlawresearch.uk/2023/03/29/legal-analysis-of-the-illegal-migration-bill-262-2022-23-clauses-21-28-modern-slavery/. Date accessed 6 March 2025.

Kelly, Brian L., and Trevor G. Gates 2010. "Using the Strengths Perspective in the Social Work Interview with Young Adults Who Have Experienced Childhood Sexual Abuse. Social Work in Mental Health." *Social Work in Mental Health* 8: 421–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/15332981003744438

Kempadoo, Kamala. 2015. "The Modern-Day White (Wo)Man's Burden: Trends in Anti-Trafficking and Anti-Slavery Campaigns." *Journal of Human Trafficking* 1: 8–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2015.1006120

Kinney, Edith. 2013. "Securitising Sex, Bodies, and Borders: The Resonance of Human Security Frames in Thailand's 'War against Human Trafficking.'" In *Gender, Violence, and Human Security: Critical Feminist Perspectives*, edited by Aili Mari Tripp, Myra Marx Ferree and Christina Ewig, 79–108. New York: NYU Press.

Landler, Mark, and Stephen. Castle 2021. "Upbeat Official Report on Race in Britain Draws a Swift Backlash." The New York Times, March 31. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/31/world/europe/britain-racism.html. Date accessed 24 February 2024.

Mai, Nicola. 2018. *Mobile Orientations: An Intimate Autoethnography of Migration, Sex Work, and Humanitarian Borders*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226585147.001.0001

Manea, Dragoş, and Mihaela Precup. 2020. "Infantilizing the Refugee: On the Mobilization of Empathy in Kate Evans' Threads from the Refugee Crisis." *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 35: 481–87. https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2020.1738078

Masoumi, Azar. 2021. "Fast Refugee Protection: Temporality and Migration Control." *Social & Legal Studies* 31: 197–215

Matrix Chambers. 2019. "Government Concedes Judicial Review and Promises Wholesale Reform to Its System for Providing Support to Victims of Trafficking." Matrix Chambers, July 9. https://www.matrixlaw.co.uk/news/government-concedes-judicial-review-and-promises-wholesale-reform-to-its-system-for-providing-support-to-victims-of-trafficking/#_edn2. Date accessed 19 February 2025.

May, Theresa. 2016a. "My Government Will Lead the Way in Defeating Modern Slavery." The Sunday Telegraph, July 30. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/07/30/we-will-lead-the-way-in-defeating-modern-slavery/. Date accessed 24 February 2025.

May, Vanessa. 2016b. "What Does the Duration of Belonging Tell Us about the Temporal Self?" *Time & Society* 25: 634–51

Mayblin, Lucy. 2018. *Asylum After Empire: Colonial Legacies in the Politics of Asylum Seeking*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.

Mcareavey, Ruth, and Chaitali Das. 2013. "A Delicate Balancing Act: Negotiating with Gatekeepers for Ethical Research when Researching Minority Communities." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 12: 113–31. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940691301200102

Mcgrath, Siobhán, and Samantha Watson. 2018. "Anti-Slavery as Development: A Global Politics of Rescue." *Geoforum* 93: 22–31. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.04.013

Mcnamara, Patricia. 2009. "Feminist Ethnography." *Qualitative Social Work* 8: 161–77. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325009103373

McNevin, Anne. 2020. "Time and the Figure of the Citizen." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 33: 545–59.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

McNevin, Anne. 2022. "Mobility and Its Discontents: Seeing beyond International Space and Progressive Time," *Politics and Space* 40: 994–1011.

Meadowcroft, John. 2024. "Altruism and Self-interest in Constitutional Reform: The Case of the British Abolition of Slavery and the Slave Trade." *Public Choice*, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-024-01206-9

Middleton, Jennifer, and Amber McDonald. 2020. "Creating Sanctuary: Trauma-Informed Change for Survivors of Sex Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation." In *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking*, edited by John Winterdyk and Jackie Jones, 583–600. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://www.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63058-8_35

Mignolo, Walter. 2011. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham: Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822394501

Moody, Jessica. 2023. "From a Culture of Abolition to a Culture War: Remembering Transatlantic Enslavement in Britain, 1807-2021." In *Violence and Public Memory*, edited by Martin Henry Blatt, 102–26. Abingdon: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003217848

Morefield, Jeannie. 2020. "'Families of Mankind': British Liberty, League Internationalism, and the Traffic in Women and Children." *History of European Ideas* 46: 681–96. https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2020.1746085

Mountz, Alison. 2020. *The Death of Asylum: Hidden Geographies of the Enforcement Archipelago*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctv15d8153

Musso, Sandrine. 2020. "The Truth of the Body as Controversial Evidence: An Investigation into Age Assessments of Migrant Minors in France." In *Waiting and the Temporalities of Irregular Migration*, edited by Christine M. Jacobsen, Marry-Anne Karlsen and Shahram Khosravi, 151–69. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429351730-12

Nijjar, Jasbinder S. 2022. "Racial Warfare and the Biopolitics of Policing." *Social Identities* 28: 441–57. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2022.2056438

O'Connell Davidson, Julia. 2015. *Modern Slavery: The Margins of Freedom*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Oesch, Lucas. 2019. "The Politics of Temporariness and the Materiality of Refugee Camps." In *Arrival Infrastructures*, edited by Bruno Meeus, Karel Arnaut and Bas van Heur, 229–48. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91167-0_10

Oldfield, John R. 2007. *Chords of Freedom: Commemoration, Ritual and British Transatlantic Slavery*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Press Association. 2016. "Theresa May Pledges £33M Boost for Fight against Slavery in Britain." The Guardian, July 31. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jul/31/theresa-may-pledges-33m-boost-for-fight-against-slavery-in-britain. Date accessed 20 February 2025.

Quirk, Joel, and David Richardson. 2009. "Anti-slavery, European Identity and International Society: A Macro-historical Perspective." *Journal of Modern European History* 7: 68–92. https://doi.org/10.17104/1611-8944_2009_1_68

Quirk, Joel. 2011. *The Anti-Slavery Project: From the Slave Trade to Human Trafficking*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Ramsay, Georgina. 2017. "Incommensurable Futures and Displaced Lives: Sovereignty as Control over Time." *Public Culture* 29: 515–38. https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-3869584

Rayaprol, Aparna. 2016. "Feminist Research: Redefining Methodology in the Social Sciences." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 50: 368–88. https://doi.org/10.1177/0069966716657460

Schwarz, Corinne. 2023. *Policing Victimhood: Human Trafficking, Frontline Work, and the Carceral State*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. https://doi.org/10.36019/9781978833333

Segrave, Marie, Sanja Milivojevic, and Sharon Pickering. 2017. *Sex Trafficking and Modern Slavery: The Absence of Evidence*, 2nd ed.. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315542560

Sharma, Nandita. 2005. "Anti-Trafficking Rhetoric and the Making of a Global Apartheid." *NWSA Journal* 17: 88–111. https://doi.org/10.2979/NWS.2005.17.3.88

Shepherd, Ally Victoria. 2024. "Seeking Asylum During a Pandemic: A Postcolonial media Discourse Analysis." *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 0. https://doi.org/10.1177/00207152241260722

Shilliam, Robbie. 2013. "Black Redemption, Not (White) Abolition." In *Claiming the International*, edited by Arlene B. Tickner and David L. Blaney, 141–58. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203758366

Stovall, Tyler. 2021. *White Freedom: The Racial History of an Idea*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691205366

Trier-Bieniek, A. 2012. "Framing the Telephone Interview as a Participant-Centred Tool for Qualitative Research: A Methodological Discussion." *Qualitative Research* 12: 630–44. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112439005

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

UN General Assembly. 2000. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. New York: November 15. GA RES 55 /25.

Warren, Calvin L. 2018. *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation*. Durham: Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822371847

Webber, Frances. 2022. “The Racialisation of British Citizenship.” *Race & Class* 64: 75–93

Weller, Susie. 2017. “Using Internet Video Calls in Qualitative (longitudinal) Interviews: Some Implications for Rapport.” *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 20: 613–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1269505

Nira Yuval-Davis, Kalpana Kannabiran and Ulrike Vieten. eds. 2006. *The Situated Politics of Belonging*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446213490

Zehfuss, Maja, and Nick Vaughan-Williams. 2024. “From Security-Space to Time-Race: Reimagining Borders and Migration in Global Politics.” *International Political Sociology* 18: olae019. https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olae019

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/19/4/olaf035/8248237 by guest on 15 September 2025

Clifford, Emily (2025) “*I Belong, but Do I Really Belong*?” the Suspended Future of the “Modern Slave” in British Protection Politics. *International Political Sociology*, https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olaf035

© The Author(s) 2025. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the International Studies Association. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted reuse, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.