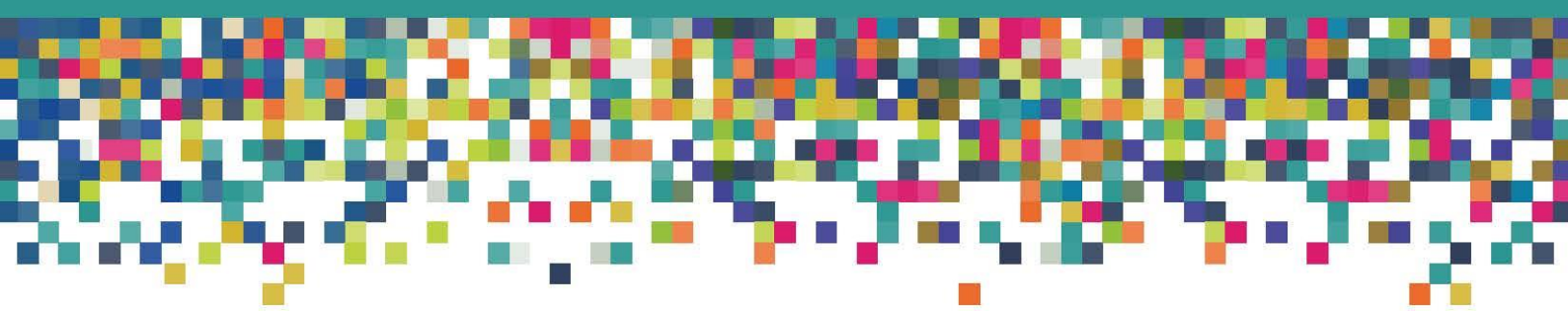




Media and
Communications

Media@LSE MSc Dissertation Series

Editors: Bart Cammaerts and Nick Anstead



THE POLICE HAVE CONFIRMED ALL 39 VICTIMS WERE CHINESE

The Mis/Recognition Of Vietnamese Migrants In Their
Mediated Encounters Within UK Newspapers

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'The Police Have Confirmed All 39 Victims Were Chinese'

The Mis/Recognition Of Vietnamese Migrants In Their Mediated Encounters Within UK Newspapers

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Published by Media@LSE, London School of Economics and Political Science ("LSE"), Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE. The LSE is a School of the University of London. It is a Charity and is incorporated in England as a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Act (Reg number 70527).

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Abstract

This dissertation approaches news coverage of the 39 victims found dead in a lorry in Essex, in October 2019. After a complicated identification process mired with mistakes and mediated by newspapers, including the Essex police's incorrect identification of the victims as Chinese, all 39 victims were finally identified as Vietnamese. This occurred against the backdrop of Vietnamese communities having been historically excluded from the UK's public consciousness.

The aim of this dissertation is to critically examine the ways in which the Vietnamese migrant victims were recognised and/or misrecognised in UK news representations. Building on a postcolonial understanding of representations as mediated encounters constituting imaginaries of the 'migrant Other' who does not belong in 'our' communities, and recognition as the affirmation of difference and political voice, dominant frames of migrant mis/recognition were initially identified, inscribed in discourses of racialisation (East Asian invisibility), humanitarian securitisation (victim/threat) and sexual humanitarianism (the ideal victim). A multimodal critical discourse analysis was conducted on nine news articles, representing the UK's ideological and stylistic spectrum (the Guardian, the Metro and the Daily Mail) and covering a two-week time period in which the victims were mistaken as Chinese and reidentified as Vietnamese. The victims were mainly misrecognised within narrow definitions of race/nationality, gender and victimhood/threat. However, discourses of Vietnamese migrant unfamiliarity and 'invisibility' in tension with discourses of migrant 'hypervisibility' both shaped the misrecognition of their 'stranger-ness' to imaginaries of the 'migrant', and led Vietnamese families to take action to be recognised as voices of value, with representations of grieving relatives and selfies of victims positing narrow and conditional potentialities for recognition. Ultimately, the constant playing with stranger-ness and victimhood/threat in news representations places Vietnamese migrants in a state of ambivalence, neither recognised as 'us' or 'migrant Other', thus placing them outside the boundaries of belonging.

INTRODUCTION

We are in the process of identifying the victims. However I anticipate that this could be a lengthy process. (Ch Supt Andrew Mariner of Essex police, October 23 2019)

We are deeply shocked and saddened by the loss of the 39 people, believed to be of Chinese origins. (Edmond Yeo, chairman of Chinese Information and Advice Centre, October 24 2019)

Essex Police confirmed it believes all 39 migrants found dead on October 23 are Vietnamese, after first reporting they were Chinese nationals. (Daily Mail, November 2 2019)

The 39 victims found in a lorry in Essex in October 2019 sent shockwaves across the UK nation. While not the first time such a tragedy was witnessed within UK borders, the graphic nature in which the victims were found – naked and foaming at the mouths – was repeated across national newspapers and television broadcasts. The police and government immediately undertook the process of identifying the victims’ country of origin, with the developing picture mediated by news stories. However, the process was mired by complications including a premature confirmation of the victims’ identities as Chinese trafficking victims, until days later, following pleas from Vietnamese families to investigate, police found that all 39 victims were Vietnamese, some of whom had paid to be smuggled into the UK.

The point of departure for this dissertation is one question: *why were the victims misidentified as Chinese?* According to the number of victims identified under the National Referral Mechanism, Vietnam is consistently the third highest nationality among migrants trafficked into the UK (National Crime Agency, 2018), however Vietnamese migrants are perceived as largely excluded from British public and political spheres (Sims, 2007). Indeed, after news coverage of the 39 victims started waning, so too did national interest in supporting Vietnamese migrants. In 2020, familiar news stories of migrants crossing the Channel and presenting ‘threats’ have been revitalised in association with the UK’s ‘hostile environment’ policies, while the 2019 lorry tragedy has disappeared from the public consciousness. This opens up questioning of the conditions in which Western audiences are able to

recognise 'distant others' (Chouliaraki, 2006: 19; Silverstone, 2006: 109), what 'identities' are privileged in our collective imaginaries of who 'vulnerable migrants' are (Orgad, 2012), and our ability to identify and provide humanitarian solidarity, empathy and care towards vulnerable others (Silverstone, 2002).

The news coverage of the Vietnamese victims, in which their 'discovery' was mediated and identities continually reconstituted, provides a renewed opportunity to critically examine social and moral issues present in Western representations of the migrant 'Other'. This dissertation builds upon the postcolonial understanding of media representations as socially constituted and constitutive. Viewing the UK news mediascape as a predominant site of 'mediated encounters' (Zaborowski and Georgiou, 2019) with migrants, this research assumes imaginaries of the 'migrant Other' are constructed through news stories maintaining colonial legacies of power asymmetries (Said, 1978; Kinnvall, 2016). At the heart of this dissertation is the theory of *recognition*: the affirmation of difference, political agency and voice, made possible through mediated encounters (Phillips, 2003; Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017). This dissertation will therefore critically analyse news representations of the 39 victims to uncover the ways in which Vietnamese migrants are mis/recognised. It will especially engage with tensions between dominant discourses around the 'invisible' Vietnamese figure and 'hypervisible' migrant, and the questions this poses for mis/recognition of certain migrant groups.

This research hopes to make an original contribution to the literature on migrant representation post-'migrant crisis', by moving beyond dominant scholarship on victimhood/threat binaries and expanding the frames of migrant mis/recognition produced within representations of an understudied and excluded migrant group.

THEORETICAL CHAPTER

Postcolonial representations of the 'migrant'

This dissertation adopts a critical postcolonial lens towards analysing media representations of migrant deaths within the UK's borders. Media representations have long been posited to play a powerful role in shaping understanding of the self, the world and its social relations. The material world cannot fix meaning itself, but via print, television, digital and other modes, media representations *stand for* subjects and events, producing, communicating and circulating meanings of what constitutes the world, thus shaping a shared perception of 'reality' (Hall, 1997; Orgad, 2012: 47). Postcolonial studies posit that, in representational meanings being socially constitutive, their meaning is also *constituted* within colonial forms of 'economic, institutional and symbolic power, *the power to draw, delineate and attempt to define*' (Titley, 2019: 36, emphasis mine). Said's 'Orientalism' (1978) demonstrates how pervasive 'discourses', social practices representing knowledge (Fairclough, 2003) of the non-European 'Other', have been constructed and naturalised through colonial and institutional European powers articulating the 'Orient' within oppositional discourses of the civilised, white *coloniser* versus the 'barbaric', non-white *colonised*. The concepts of Europe and the British Empire as a comparative 'project of modernity' (Kinnvall, 2016: 157) have endured throughout history and are integral in enabling the continued management and subordination of the Other, and the conceptions of '(European) territory, community, and ethno-cultural belonging' (ibid: 153).

Contemporary European news media, entangled in 'the legacy of European colonialisms' (ibid: 153) and functioning to tell stories of other locations and subjects for Western audiences, continue to speak on behalf of distant others (Silverstone, 2006). UK news stories may thus symbolically reassert a postcolonial imaginary of the non-European 'Other' as separate from modern Britain and British values, bound up in power asymmetries which regulate how the subject may be spoken about and identified (Spivak, 1988; Hall, 1997; Bhabra, 2007). The migrant is one such post-colonial subject (Rico, 2005: 5): the increasing number of non-European migrants to the UK since the 2010s has engendered largely hostile media reporting (Berry, Garcia-Blano and Moore, 2015), peaking in the establishment of the European 'migrant crisis', in which narratives symbolically constructed the

ambivalent migrant figure arriving at British shores and disrupting 'British' culture, stability and security (Chouliaraki, Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017: 8). News coverage has regularly engaged in discourses of 'othering' migrants via fear or spectacle of their suffering (Pickering, 2001), with migrant identities racialised, gendered and securitised as 'in/outside' (Kinnvall, 2016: 153). These discourses work in tandem with and serve to justify restrictive border policies against 'illegal immigration', such as the UK's 'hostile environment' (Candappa, 2019).

The power of the UK news media in presenting their representations as truthful 'mirrors' to reality shapes collective imaginaries of how we relate to others; where borders lie; and how we should respond to migrants (Appadurai, 1996; Orgad, 2012: 98). It is thus crucial to deconstruct coverage such as that of the 39 migrants, and their meaning-producing practices, to examine their political claims of who can speak for whom, on which terms; about who *is* and *isn't* seen; *how* migrants are seen, and how the (un)seen may be granted authority and legitimacy (Silverstone and Georgiou, 2005). Challenging these claims can thusly reimagine migrants' lived experiences, 'bringing into being *new* facts' (Bhabra, 2007: 15) of what it means to be a migrant making such precarious journeys.

However, it is important to emphasise that the 'Other' does not exist but is constructed from the initial (mediated) encounter of the coloniser with the colonised (Said, 1978; Zaborowski and Georgiou, 2019: 94). Such constructions are reliant on constituting *difference* (Hall, 1997; Orgad, 2012: 63), with the delineation of symbolic boundaries made possible by the media's constant 'playing with difference and sameness' (Silverstone, 2006: 19), predicated on historical regimes of power. However, mediated encounters opening up potentialities for constituting identities of the self and other (Ahmed, 2000) can lead to the shifting, contradictions, and contestations of boundaries. Encounters may even enable the ability to instead 'see Others and the Self as more than competing ontological existences' (Zaborowski and Georgiou, 2019: 105).

Globalised media networks provide increasingly numerous paths towards encountering 'an ever-growing range of strangers' (Orgad, 2012: 55), presenting opportunities for dominant meanings to be 'transformed by agents of contending groups' (Maia, 2014: 32). The discovery of the 39 victims in the Essex lorry can thus be understood as an initial material and mediated encounter between the migrant

'stranger' (Ahmed, 2000) – with little established background but already implicated as an 'outsider' – and 'us', to explore the negotiations of meaning potentialities, enforce the unfixity of meaning of the 'migrant' (Hall, 1997: 17), and aid understanding of how contesting claims of identities were generated throughout the news coverage.

Recognition and misrecognition

If news representations are contingent on signifying difference, then they are domains for symbolic acts of recognition or misrecognition (hereafter referred to as mis/recognition) (Honneth, 2012). While theories diverge, a broad understanding of recognition is the mutual acknowledgement of *difference*, providing the normative foundation for demands for equal rights (Meer, Martineau and Thompson, 2012). Taylor's (1994) 'politics of recognition' posits that understanding of one's identity can only occur through others acknowledging one's identity. Within a cultural 'politics of difference' (ibid: 38), all have the right for their unique cultural identities to be recognised and meaningfully affirmed as of equal worth (ibid: 64). Struggles for recognition are proposed as a struggle for institutional recognition of distinct group identities, with misrecognition causing 'real damage' if they see demeaning images (ibid: 25). However, Taylor has been criticised for his focus on reaffirming existing cultural group identities, working to homogenise and 'fix' them (Phillips, 2007), in the process obscuring individual needs (Hirvonen, 2012).

Honneth (1992, 2000) contrastingly focuses on the mis/recognised *individual*, constructing spheres of recognition necessary for self-realisation: *love* (from friends and family, enabling development of self-confidence), *rights* (equal legal status given via legal institutions, enabling development of self-respect), and *solidarity* (the mutual respect of personal differences and traits, enabling development of self-esteem). Recognition is thus conditional; the denial of equal status or disrespect of difference fails to fulfil prerequisites for legal *rights* and social *solidarity* (ibid). Here, individual self-realisation is interdependent with political/social institutions: institutions enable freedom for self-individualisation, while self-realisation enables institutions to become cultural societies of solidarity (Honneth, 1992). Social struggles are ultimately interpreted as struggles for *cultural recognition*: the denial of recognition and feelings of disrespect justifies marginalised groups' social movements.

Fraser (1997) positions herself in opposition to Taylor and Honneth, arguing that calls for cultural recognition and 'identity politics' have neglected socioeconomic injustice. Here, cultural recognition constitutes certain groups being denied equal status due to institutional and 'social patterns of representation, interpretation and communication' (ibid: 71), devaluing and denying them 'parity of participation' (ibid: 141) – the ability to participate in political/social life. Fraser separates cultural recognition from socioeconomic redistribution (ibid: 69), positing that justice requires *both* to be achieved, with cultural recognition requiring transformation of the frameworks generating dominant social patterns (ibid: 82). However, Honneth argues that recognition and redistribution are inseparable, with misrecognition the foundation on which misdistribution arises (Fraser and Honneth, 2003). Nonetheless, the denial of *equal participation* via institutional patterns is a useful concept to understand practices of mis/recognition within media representations.

It may be useful to review Phillips' (2003) re-conception of struggles of recognition as struggles for political *voice*: recognition is at stake when marginalised groups are denied their voice as 'political actors in their own right' (ibid: 4), as injustices cannot be addressed without agency to speak on them. In her deconstruction of feminist movements, Phillips argues that through struggles for voice, group members (and their collective cultural identity) can be recognised as of equal value, thus challenging 'difference-blind' policies, but do not have to be valued *only* for their differing qualities – reducing the need to define difference, as with 'identity politics' (ibid: 7). Recognition becomes a means to an end rather than the goal, with recognition of voice leading to contestation of dominant patterns of injustice.

Bridging Honneth's view that a society of *cultural solidarity and self-individualisation* is a pre-requisite for recognition; Fraser's focus on *institutionalised patterns of misrecognition*; and Phillips' re-conception of recognition as *equal political voice* provides a suitable framework to examine how struggles for recognition of migrants – who should be recognised as a *different* albeit heterogenous group with equal political value and voice to 'us' – take place within news representations which, in predominately speaking 'in the name of' migrants (Spivak, 1988) enact patterns of mediated misrecognition. Moreover, the distinction between 'voice as value' (Couldry, 2010) – who migrants are seen to be in terms of their (cultural) difference, and if they 'belong' as equals – and 'voice as narrative' (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017: 617)– the linguistic/visual news choices shaping

migrant representations and enactment of their 'voice as value' – serves useful for indicating *how* news representations generate potentialities for mis/recognition. Struggles for recognition are ultimately inherently mediated: news representations not only construct difference, but make claims of what is legitimate and valued difference 'as part of cultural and political discourses within a broader social milieu' (Maia, 2014: 31), consequently shaping the conditions, social imaginaries and public debates around the recognition of 'others' within legal and political domains (ibid: 2).

A postcolonial lens posits that UK news representations of non-European migrants, signifying mediated encounters with a range of meaning potentialities, predominately *misrecognise* migrants through discursive patterns of dominance/subordination. Indeed, Meer, Martineau and Thompson (2012: 138), in conceptualising misrecognition, argue its politicisation occurs when 'coupled with unequal power structures [...] to allow some sets of norms to be normalised'. Importantly, normatively casting the process of mediated recognition as a precondition for social justice raises questions of migrants' institutional de/humanisation via news representations, enabling the basis for their transformation.

Frames of mediated mis/recognition

Conceptualising practices and subjects of migrant misrecognition can highlight injustices and shape expectations of what recognition should entail (Meer, Martineau and Thompson, 2012: 132). Maia (2014: 34-35) outlines four postcolonial mediated strategies of misrecognition: *invisibility*, absence meaning groups are unable to affirm their existence; *stereotyping*, reducing and fixing group differences, thus promoting subordination; *selective exclusion*, giving more weight to certain voices; and *decontextualisation*, seeking to remove the subject from their sociohistorical and political contexts. Moving from negative to positive representations, or exclusion to inclusion of migrant voices, does not necessarily eliminate misrecognition; multiple political concerns and migrant identities may continue to be ignored or spoken for within 'simplified complex representations' (Alsultany, 2012).

Dominant media 'frames' (Goffman, 1974) deploying these strategies of mis/recognition, which may shape public understanding of the Vietnamese 'trafficking victim'/migrant, have been identified. Although representational meanings are many, shifting and contesting, the following frames are especially prevalent, thus productive for future analysis. Nonetheless these frames' intersections and

contradictions are also discussed to uncover potentialities for fuller recognition, shaping this project's conceptual framework.

Racialisation of the Vietnamese Other

Difference is crucially articulated in the construction of *race*, a political project borne from colonialism (Erel *et al.*, 2016). In post-colonial Europe, the migrant is a 'catch-all category' [...] into which foreigners are dumped indiscriminately, though not *all* foreigners and *not only* foreigners' (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991: 221). The racialisation of those appearing non-European and *non-white* as 'migrants' contributes to their misrecognition as non-belonging Others (Titley, 2019: 71). However, representational meanings are sociohistorically specific (ibid: 46), underlining the need to briefly examine the background and specific racialised discourses of Vietnamese communities in the UK. It is worth initially considering that Vietnam are a former French, not British, colony – this has implications both for the nature of Vietnamese settlement and their inclusion in mediated discourses of UK 'nationhood' (Barber, 2015). Nonetheless, it is not necessarily only the directly postcolonial subjected to postcolonial discourses of domination/subordination, with discourses 'stretched' around anyone categorised as a non-European migrant (Titley, 2019: 71).

Seen as largely excluded from British public consciousness, the small Vietnamese diaspora in the UK is made up of initial waves of ethnically Chinese refugees, and more recently economic migrants, students, undocumented migrants and second-generation migrants (Sims, 2007; Barber, 2018). The first wave – whom as non-colonial migrants had no prior links with or support in the UK (Hale, 1992) – were subjected to dispersal policies upon arrival and effectively isolated to reduce the 'ghettoisation' of refugees (Sims, 2007: 2), resulting in little access to government support. This, alongside internal divisions of the Vietnamese 'community' along class, North/South regions, and 'authentic' ethnicity lines, has driven a lack of community cohesion and group politicisation (ibid). Their *invisibility* sees Vietnamese people occupy a position of the Othered 'stranger within' (Maguire, 2004), excluded from discourses of belonging in the UK (Back, 1996) but not seen to represent a clear threat (Barber, 2015). This contrasts the ambivalent hypervisibility of postcolonial South Asian and African-Caribbean communities dominantly mediated within frames of in/outsider subordination,

but who also have active voices within public debates on 'multiculturalism' and 'race' (Song, 2003; Barber, 2018).

When the Vietnamese *are* made visible, they are frequently seen to 'pass' (Barber, 2015) as other East Asian ethnicities. They firstly report being misidentified as the familiar 'Chinese', who have experienced greater economic integration thus provide a faulty yet recognisable category of identity in encounters of the Vietnamese 'stranger' (ibid: 532). However, they may also pass as Japanese, Thai or Korean, appealing to stereotypes of highly commodified, 'desirable' and Orientalised stereotypes of Asia (for example, of Japanese food or Korean 'K-pop' music), which are highly salient to the UK public (ibid: 534). These experiences are reinforced by little official government monitoring; the UK Census provides no option for Vietnamese residents to report their ethnicity, with all East Asians homogenised into 'Chinese', 'Asian – Other' or 'Other' categories (Sims, 2007: 6). This demonstrates the normalisation of rigid categories of 'East Asian' ethnicities, hierarchised in terms of geopolitical/historical/cultural importance and familiarity to 'Britishness' (Barber, 2015: 534), thus reinforcing *exclusion* and racialised *stereotypes* while restricting 'more nuanced understandings of the Vietnamese in Britain' (ibid: 537).

Despite Vietnamese people having been largely absent from UK media representations, contemporary news stories have racialised them within postcolonial yet contextually and spatially specific discourses of the migrant 'Other'. For example, coverage of 'new' Vietnamese migrants working in cannabis farms or nail bars have overtly focused on their associations with human trafficking, organised crime and forced migration. Linking these workplaces to notorious Chinese 'snakehead' gangs (Yeh, 2014) revitalise Orientalist and racist 'Yellow Peril' discourses of existential danger to Western communities, with such moral panics resulting in the criminalisation of Vietnamese migrants while decontextualising their lived experiences (Sims, 2007; Barber, 2015). The denial of voice within their invisibility (Sims, 2007) amid the visibility of their racialised stigmatisation leads young Vietnamese people to, for example, actively utilise strategies of 'passing' to avoid further exclusion, further reinforcing problematic stereotypes (Barber, 2015). As seen, the Vietnamese community have been subjected to narrow and highly racialised frames of mis/recognition. This has reaffirmed sociohistorical constructions of the Vietnamese as being an

ambiguous 'stranger within', only occupying 'threatening' positions in specific conditions, otherwise largely excluded from narratives of British belonging.

Humanitarian securitisation: Victimhood/threat at the 'borders'

Chouliaraki and Zaborowski (2017) found that news coverage of arrivals to the UK during the 'migrant crisis' oscillated between contradictory 'securitisation' and 'humanitarian' frames. Migrant stories and the causes of their arrivals were simultaneously told through a discourse of care towards vulnerable, powerless victims fleeing from war and deserving of help, expanding to 'ecstatic humanitarianism' at the iconic image of child Aylan Kurdi dying at the border; *and* the discourse of protection of 'our' communities against suspicious threats (ibid: 614). Strategies of migrant misrepresentation include 'bare life', in which the migrant is capable only of survival and suffering without minimal resources; collectivisation, describing migrants as anonymous 'masses'; decontextualisation; and 'agentic malevolence' of threats (ibid: 616-17; Chouliaraki and Stolić, 2019). Representational tropes of the migrant as a victim *and* threat within the Western imaginary, despite making them hypervisible, contributes to their dehumanisation and misrecognises them as 'outside of reason and history and, ultimately, outside the order of humanity' (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017: 617).

Humanitarian securitisation has been described as a 'regime of border power' (Chouliaraki and Georgiou, 2019: 596), with the practice of symbolic bordering – the mediated construction of borders in alignment with territorial controls on the ground (ibid: 595) – serving to legitimise the border as 'fixed lines' rather than a *process* of boundary making and justifying border controls as protecting us 'inside' and keeping misrecognised 'others' outside upon their arrival (Chouliaraki, 2017; Yuval-Davis *et al.*, 2019: 19). Indeed, the 'migrant crisis' and the UK's 'hostile environment' are contingent on the construction of the border and myriad of ways migrants are represented in 'crossing' it – constituting them, always, as non-belonging.

Chouliaraki and Georgiou (2019: 599), however, argue that the victim/threat binary 'underestimates the ways in which vocabularies of the migrant are deeply embedded in the shifting regimes of border power on the ground', which can enable their articulation to shift suddenly and unexpectedly. This is useful for examining the ways in which migrants are mis/recognised through 'linguistic

ambivalence' – whether named as illegal, irregular, asylum seekers, refugees, threats or victims – and how these mis/recognitions continually renegotiate 'the boundaries of 'our' communities of belonging' (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017: 615). Shifting away from the victim/threat binary also enables the identification of possibilities for the mediated recognition of migrants as 'irreducibly human others' (Chouliaraki and Stolić, 2019: 314).

Sexual humanitarianism: The 'ideal trafficking victim'

Representations of 'human trafficking' across the media, NGOs, policy, law enforcement and even academia have engaged in the construction of the 'ideal trafficking victim' (Christie, 1986: 18; Andrijasevic and Mai, 2016). The ideal victim is *stereotypically* a young, 'innocent', inherently vulnerable cisgender woman (Carpenter, 2006) or child (Enloe, 1991) from the Global South (Mohanty, 1988), tricked into sex work in other countries and victim to sexual violence (Andrijasevic and Mai, 2016: 2). The enduring power of the 'ideal victim' is firstly in its ability to be a fixed image of affect and sympathy, its severe narrative of coercion/slavery easily comprehensible and emotively appealing, thus driving public and policy support for humanitarian and enforcement responses to protect ideal victims (O'Brien, 2012). This narrative is reflected in, for example, the UK's National Crime Agency's (2020) aim to forcibly 'eradicate modern slavery' by 'pursuing and targeting offenders'. Its power is secondly in its use to 'educate' the public, in the face of unreliable data on the characteristics of trafficking (O'Brien, 2012: 3); indeed, NCA's communications campaign, captured in stylistic videos of young girls prostituted by predatory men, aims to tell people how to spot signs of trafficking.

This 'sexual humanitarianism' (Mai, 2016: 2) functions to problematise or support certain migrant groups along gendered, sexualised and racialised conceptions of vulnerability, misrecognising the complex myriad of factors behind forced migration (Andrijasevic and Mai, 2016). Firstly, the portrayal of the passive, ideal victim trafficked and exploited in the sex industry misrecognises migrant agency in choosing this path as a necessary economic activity (ibid: 2). 'Agentic' prostitution, however, is at best seen as devoid of exploitation and at worst as 'whore-like', violating gendered assumptions of the 'innocent and blameless woman' (O'Brien, 2012: 8). This forcibly separates the experiences and needs of 'trafficked' and 'irregular' migrants, while denying their intersections

within migrants' lived experiences: many will, having willingly consented to being smuggled or to engage in sex work, face exploitation later in their journey (Mai, 2016: 4).

In their ability to grant 'victim status' (Hoyle, Bosworth and Dempsey, 2011), mediated discourses enforce a 'hierarchy' of victimhood and migrant behaviour (O'Brien, 2012: 6) with ideal victims emerging as the 'most worthy of public sympathy and government protection' (ibid: 1). This *selective exclusion* drives misrecognition of those implicitly identified as 'non'-ideal victims but whom are vulnerable to exploitation, including the aforementioned agentic sex workers, adult trans men engaging in sex work, and/or those in irregular industries, while reinforcing that *they* are not sympathetic protagonists, unless facing unconsented, extreme, physical exploitation (Blume, 2015: 21). The 'ideal victim' in turn reifies the undesirable other, ostensibly framing *other migrants* – typically men from postcolonial countries – as perpetrators and 'ideal villains' (Christie, 1986: 26) and encouraging restrictive policies that, for example, advocate for the closure of workplaces (Mai, 2016: 4). This not only shapes postcolonial social imaginaries but forces migrants to 'perform' according to ideal victimhood scripts, constructing stories to garner support from NGOs and have their rights recognised – or else face criminalisation and deportation within stringent anti-immigration policies (ibid: 2), ensuring *more* vulnerability.

Mai (2016, 2018), however, indicates potentialities for 'non-ideal' victims' voices to be recognised in his ethnographic research with trans migrants and agentic sex workers. For example, the *Emborders* project describes Nigerian sex workers whom 'accept a bounded degree of exploitation to reduce socio-economic hardship of their families' (Mai, 2016: 9), whereby exploitation is constituted not as being *in* sex work, but as the betrayal of 'agreements' between them and their smugglers, who lie about working conditions prior to their arrival (ibid). Their multifaceted experiences are seen to be shaped by 'race, ethnicity, poverty and immigration status, which intersect with but extend beyond gender' (Fehrenbacher *et al.*, 2020: 183), highlighting gaps between their needs and sexual humanitarian policies (Mai, 2016: 2). Ultimately, migrants are seen to possess conditional and contextual agency *alongside* exploitation and suffering, forcing understanding beyond hierarchies of victimhood (ibid: 12). The potentialities for recognising 'non-ideal' victims within news representations are thus situated in nuanced considerations of migrants' experiences within socio-historically and culturally specific relations of subordination/agency. Attempting to instead 'stretch

the discursive boundaries of the 'ideal victim paradigm' to non-ideal victims 'would do little to ameliorate the structural inequalities that shape their lives' (Fehrenbacher *et al.*, 2020: 191).

Intersections, contradictions, ambivalences

Despite identifying three frames of misrecognition that have been historically deployed to construct imaginaries of the 'Vietnamese', the 'migrant/threat' and the 'ideal trafficking victim' respectively, tensions inherent in the intersections of these frames reveal areas of questioning for how the 39 victims in our case study were mis/recognised.

Firstly, the invisible/excluded Vietnamese subject works in tension with the hypervisibility of the migrant 'victim/threat'. Although contemporary news coverage has started to stretch frames of victimhood/threat around 'new arrivals' of Vietnamese migrants, Vietnamese migrants largely remain the stranger within. This raises questions of how the 39 victims were mis/recognised throughout their mediated encounters, how racialised discourses of the 'Vietnamese' or 'East Asians' have been reproduced or held in tension with hypervisible discourses, and how their ambiguity may open possibilities to recognition of voice. Secondly, representations of Vietnamese 'trafficking victims' are relatively unstudied, despite established flows of Vietnam-UK trafficking and mediated 'moral panics'. If the 39 victims – several of whom consented to being smuggled – were recognised as non-ideal/ideal victims, then what does this mean for how they are spoken about? Analysing news coverage in relation to 'sexual humanitarianism' frames can uncover conditions of mis/recognition specifically for the Vietnamese migrants – not to stretch discursive boundaries of who an 'ideal victim' is, but to demonstrate its universality *or* unsuitability across migrant groups and the situating of their agency/exploitation.

In exploring dominant frames of mis/recognition and potentialities for recognition within their intersections, this research argues that these frames are unstable, held in tandem and tension across representations. Mis/recognition may shift across different news stories and *within* the same story, operating in relation to socio-political contexts and perceptions of migrant groups prior to encounter (Ahmed, 2000).

Conceptual framework

Following substantial news coverage of the 39 Vietnamese people found dead in a lorry in Essex in October 2019, this research examines how Vietnamese migrant victims are represented in the UK news media. It takes its point of departure from the initial 'mediated encounter' with the migrant 'stranger', which constitutes identities of the 'self' and the 'other' (Ahmed, 2000: 8). At this site of possibility, a postcolonial lens posits that migrants are predominately misrepresented as non-belonging 'Others', reproducing power asymmetries that construct gendered, sexualised, racialised and securitised identities. A theoretical understanding of 'recognition' as a struggle for political *voice* and *agency* to challenge cultural patterns of non-solidarity offers the ability to explore how representational meanings constructed through news texts produce migrant mis/recognition, with implications for migrant humanisation, belonging and solidarity. Outlining three frames of mediated mis/recognition and their intersections – the racialisation of the Vietnamese Other, victimhood/threat within border regimes of humanitarian securitisation, and the 'ideal trafficking victim' via sexual humanitarianism – provides conceptual vocabularies to analyse news representations of the 39 victims, and make sense of the different ways the stories engender struggles for recognition.

This work builds upon the existing literature in several ways. Firstly, the victims' deaths come at a point of ever-increasing mediated encounters with distant others. Nonetheless, the coverage of *these* victims presents a 'site of possibility' partly because Vietnamese people occupy the position of the unfamiliar 'stranger within', but also because of the central importance of their 'discovery' within media speculation of their identities. As such, the news media actively constructed images and narratives of the migrants' identities, transforming from the initial 'stranger' to different positions as more information was uncovered – including the correction of their identities from 'Chinese' to 'Vietnamese'. This context presents the opportunity to move beyond reductive binaries to critically examine the tensions and contradictions in meaning-making over the course of the mediated encounter, forcing a more complex examination of how these representations shape unstable frames of migrant mis/recognition. Finally, this work aims to make an original contribution by studying a fairly neglected group in UK media and migration studies, an inevitable by-product of their invisibility in British public consciousness. This illuminates potential tensions between prevailing

racialised discourses of Vietnamese invisibility with discourses of migrant hypervisibility post 'migrant-crisis'.

This leads to the following research questions:

RQ: In what ways are Vietnamese migrant victims recognised and misrecognised in UK news media representations?

SQR1: How do frames of recognition shift over the course of the media coverage?

SRQ2: In what ways do representations of the Vietnamese victims highlight tensions between migrant discourses of hypervisibility and invisibility?

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Multimodal critical discourse analysis

This research employed Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (hereafter referred to as MMCDA) to examine news media texts. MMCDA is an emerging field, positing that discourses are found not only in linguistic texts but other semiotic modes, such as images and sound (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001; Machin and Mayr, 2012). It is strongly influenced by critical discourse analysis, a set of approaches regarding language as socio-historically *constructed* and socially *constitutive* (Fairclough, 2010: 8; Machin and Mayr, 2012: 4). Meanings of the world are shaped by *discourses*, sets of social practices representing knowledge about subjects, which regulate the ways we communicate and draw meaning from these subjects (Hall, 1997: 291; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). In establishing and maintaining certain ideas and values, discourses may naturalise *ideologies* that contribute to 'maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation' (Fairclough, 2003: 9). The work of MMCDA is to deconstruct the 'social effects' (ibid) of texts: the ways in which they produce, circulate and challenge intertextual meanings (Kristeva, 1977) in interconnected media

flows, naturalising or resisting power asymmetries within ways of seeing the world, for example imaginaries of the 'migrant' or communities of 'non/belonging'.

MMCDA's point of departure from CDA, thus its applicability to this dissertation, is in privileging both visual and linguistic features of texts, critically considering their separate functions *and* interactions in meaning-making (Machin, 2016: 325). MMCDA links critical discourse analysis with social semiotics theory (Machin and Mayr, 2012: 17; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996), whereby language/visuals are seen as modes or semiotic *resources* chosen in certain ways to express certain ideologies. What underlies both is their *meaning potentials*, which differs according to the semiotic resource and its affordances (Ledin and Machin, 2015; Machin, 2016: 327). For example, the specific affordance of a photograph (versus, say, a cartoon) is its ability to present itself as 'unmediated reality' allowing it to make intertextual references to themes presented in other photographs (Machin, 2016: 328). Thus, images may communicate more or less effectively, or communicate different things, than language (Machin, Caldas-Coulthard and Milani, 2016: 305). MMCDA ultimately deconstructs the way semiotic resources are deployed in specific contexts to signify ideological meanings, and why specific modes were chosen to do this (Machin, 2016: 325).

While CDA – particularly Fairclough's three-dimensional approach analysing the *textual*, *discursive* and *societal* dimensions of language – has been revered within media studies, pioneers of MMCDA critique CDA in not engaging with the *multimodality* of texts. Indeed, a pilot of the methodological approach for this dissertation found that Fairclough's approach examined visual features much less effectively than language features. This is problematic considering the importance of visuals in portraying certain meanings of migrants, for example the 'boat image' of mass migrants which shaped the European 'migrant crisis' and imaginary of migrant *threat* (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017), or the image of Aylan Kurdi found dead at the border (Vis and Goriunova, 2015), used to shape ecstatic humanitarian narratives.

The application of MMCDA to postcolonial studies may be seen as inevitable, as both focus on examining the ways representations legitimise and reproduce certain ideologies and power asymmetries within specific sociohistorical contexts (Meyer, 2001: 15; Fairclough, 2010). Understanding news stories as prevalent sites of meaning-making and circulation (Fairclough, 2010:

470), and as *multimodal texts* using visual and lexical semiotic choices to construct postcolonial ideologies and imaginaries of migrants, enables exploration of how news coverage represented and mis/recognised the 39 Vietnamese victims. Moreover, MMCDAs and postcolonial studies occupy explicitly *normative* stances, advocating for social justice in the face of sociohistorical power relations (van Dijk, 1993; Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999), therefore enabling the discovery of potentialities for fuller migrant recognition.

Research design

There is a considerable lack of consolidation across approaches used for analysing multimodal texts (Machin, Caldas-Coulthard and Milani, 2016). However Machin and Mayr's (2012) comprehensive overview of MMCDAs offers a set of analytical tools that ask the researcher to describe multiple visual and linguistic choices and explain how they communicate certain discourses, embedded in the production of certain ideologies – as per Fairclough's approach – but also ask to view these in context of their affordances (*ibid*).

Drawing on this text and Machin's critical review of multimodality (2016), the following five-step framework has been outlined to analyse the selected news articles:

1. **Consider lexical semiotic choices:** including connotations, overlexicalisation (repetitive terms) suppression or absence, structural oppositions, choice of words, choice of speaker, speech, grammar, substitution
2. **Consider visual semiotic choices:** including personalisation, proximity, settings, poses, foreground, background, attributes (how objects are represented and their frequency), choice of subject, lighting, salience (size of images, colour, tone, focus, overlapping), gaze, absences
3. **... in constructing discourses:** the broader ideas communicated including genre, argumentation, assumptions and intertextuality
4. **Consider the role semiotic choices play in constructing social meaning:** whose interests do these choices serve? What is said about society? What is de/recontextualised? Why is this deployed (what discourses are being used to shape what social practices)?
5. **Consider affordances across semiotic resources:** Why was this mode chosen? What meaning potentials does it have? How is this choice already discursively shaped by representational

regimes (Machin, 2016: 331)? How do the image and text differ/relate? What does the image communicate that the text does not and vice versa?

Sample selection

This dissertation focuses on online news articles from UK newspapers. The UK news mediascape is diverse, occupying opposing positions along left-right ideological spectrums, and stylistically following broadsheet-tabloid genre divisions. This has implications for how Vietnamese migrants are represented and mis/recognised across the mediascape, and the embeddedness of ideologies within each newspaper. Historically, right-wing newspapers, particularly sensationalist tabloids, have applied threat and criminalisation frames to migrants to justify greater border control, whereas left-wing newspapers are more likely to frame migrant arrivals as a humanitarian issue (Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore, 2015).

Three national newspapers were therefore selected: The *Daily Mail*, the *Metro*, and the *Guardian*. These outlets were chosen as reflective of the UK media spectrum; the *Daily Mail* is a right-wing tabloid, the *Metro* is an 'apolitical' tabloid freesheet (newspapers distributed for free across the country), and the *Guardian* is a left-wing broadsheet. These newspapers are among the ten most highly circulated and read online in the UK, thereby having the highest reach across the UK public, and likely to be predominant mediators of encounters between 'us' and migrants. All also produced high media coverage of the incident.

The analysed texts were published between 23rd October to 10th November, covering the time in which the victims' bodies were found to the eventual identification of the victims. Texts were found via searching the LexisNexis archive, and search functions on the news websites, using the phrases commonly used to describe the event, "lorry", "container" or "truck", and "Essex". A broad search was deliberately employed to access a wider range of news articles for sampling, ensuring the sample was unbiased towards articles that identified the victims as, for example, 'Chinese' or 'Vietnamese'.

Purposive-intensity sampling aims to produce a sample highly relevant to the research question, selecting productive texts rich in data for analysis, while excluding extreme/usual cases (Patton, 1990: 171). The selected articles meet the criteria of news reports whose main purpose is to discuss and

speculate on victims' identities and reasons for migration. This enables relevant analysis of how their identities were constituted and mis/recognised. The strategic selection of news reports instead of opinion editorials not only circumvents bias and ensures texts were representative of the typical UK news mediascape, but bolsters examination of how even 'facts-based' news genres may reinforce ideologies within supposedly neutral language.

Three texts were selected from each newspaper, representing nine texts for a combined total of 11,637 words. Each text represented significant periods during news reporting: firstly, when identified as Chinese, secondly when speculation began that victims were Vietnamese, and thirdly, when they were confirmed to be Vietnamese. This allowed exploration of how representational meanings and frames of mis/recognition shifted *across* the news event.

Among each text, 58 images were found, mostly in the *photograph* genre, representing the victims and location of the incident. A small proportion of the sample was in a graphical format. While all images were analysed, only a productive sample of eight images across the articles will be discussed.

Limitations, reflexivity and ethics

Multiple methodological criticisms have been made towards MMCDA and CDA, which must be considered in light of MMCDA's use. Firstly, CDA's unsubstantiated approaches to analysing a small number of purportedly 'unrepresentative' texts leads to claims that CDA is not rigorous or systematic (Stubbs, 1997; Breeze, 2011). This almost certainly applies to MMCDA, considering it is an emerging and contentious field (Machin, 2016). Nonetheless, this research acts as a contribution to the field in empirically exploring the effectiveness of Machin and Mayr's framework to news media representations following exclusion of 'extremity' from the sample, and in consideration that MMCDA offers the ability to study 'a much wider range of linguistic features' (Stubbs, 1997: 10).

Another critique of MMCDA/CDA is in its essentialising of the relationship between communication and power, while not considering the varied interpretation and reception of texts (Breeze, 2011). Indeed, while this dissertation carefully examines dominant frames of mis/recognition while taking care to anchor these to the context and contradictions of the specific news story (*ibid*: 506), it stops short of implying *all* audiences understand these texts similarly. CDA scholars have emphasised the

need to implement CDA approaches with ethnographic or cognitive studies, to fully examine how texts create social effects (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002).

A final critique of MMEDA/CDA is the researcher's ability to select texts that highlight claims reflecting the researcher's own (Meyer, 2001; Machin and Mayr, 2012: 213), particularly in light of MMEDA being a time-consuming and effortful approach, focused on narrow questions which *must* privilege a smaller selection of texts – thus presenting the possibility of bias (van Dijk, 2001; Fairclough, 2003: 14). Fairclough (2003: 15) consequently highlights the need to be self-reflexive of one's own positioning, prior to and during the research process: the assumption is that if knowledge of texts is 'partial and incomplete [...] then we have to accept that our categories are always provisional'. As a second-generation British Chinese-Vietnamese woman, I occupy not only one but *two* intersecting identities which have undoubtedly influenced the subject matter and research questions. Nonetheless, the purposive-intensive sample selection employed is intended to be rigorous and systematic, ensuring a reflective sample of UK news media and 'non-extreme' texts which may confirm or refute assumptions made in the literature, in short, leaving categories 'open to change' (ibid). My positioning also privileges me with the ability to interpret, read and deconstruct meanings that may be seen as common-sensical to other audiences (Gill, 1996).

Finally, few ethical challenges arose as the research does not involve human participants. As such, the dissertation's methodology and research design were approved by the researcher's dissertation supervisor via the submission of an ethics form.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Exploring the research question, *'in what ways are Vietnamese migrant victims recognised and misrecognised in UK news media representations?'*, the multimodal critical discourse analysis of nine news articles found four common frames of misrecognition across the period of coverage: discovery of the unfamiliar stranger; racial misidentification; the victimhood-threat binary; and the stretching of 'ideal victim' boundaries. However, the analysis also found potentialities for recognition of the victims as conditionally agentic yet vulnerable actors, borne from tensions between discourses of unfamiliar invisibility versus migrant hypervisibility. This section presents analysis of both texts and images, detailing how they work to produce these frames of mis/recognition.

Discovery of the unfamiliar 'stranger'

Post-discovery of the migrants' deaths, the articles prioritise the identification of the migrants as key to their narrative. In doing so, the articles articulate confusion and surprise towards 'discovering' the victims were a certain race, suggesting a quality of 'newness':

"It's obviously shocking that these deaths happened," said Nicola Macbean, the founder of The Rights Practice, who focuses on human rights in Asia. "Also, just having thought the Chinese weren't coming in that way and that they weren't the group that were the most vulnerable." (The Guardian, October 24 2019)

The 39 stowaways who died, it has now been confirmed, were not from Africa, the Middle East or Eastern Europe, as was initially suspected, but China. (Daily Mail, October 24 2019)

The first excerpt showcases use of an authoritative 'expert' voice to legitimise responses of confusion and *strangeness* over the migrants' race, while the latter uses comparisons to draw upon the social imaginary and established discourses of the (illegal) 'migrant' as claiming only *certain* identities. While the mediated encounter contains potentialities for migrant mis/recognition, by identifying the victims as 'strange' even when the 'stranger' figure is familiarised along racial lines, and by signifying their disruption of the familiar imaginary of the 'illegal migrant', the media reinforces their otherness – doubly demarcating their lack of belonging and difference outside 'us' as a society and even outside

'our' narrow recognition of the 'migrant'. In short, the victims' difference is misrecognised as '*stranger than other others*' (Ahmed, 2000: 6), as a '*stranger-ness*'. In the latter excerpt, the construction of a discovery of 'previously unsuspected' countries with flows of illegal migration to the UK creates an *exoticisation* of discovery of the 'Other', harking back to imaginaries of colonial discovery in travel writings searching for, managing and objectifying 'strangeness' (de Certeau, 1986: 67) in opposition to the self. Ironically, the articles also reference the 2008 Morecambe Bay tragedy of Chinese migrants found in a container in Dover, indicating an awareness of *historical* flows of illegal migration which is ultimately discarded in favour of ahistoricising the 39 victims and narrating their unfamiliar 'stranger-ness'.

This misrecognition is overtly racialised, firstly through the realisation of little information on illegal migration from China reinforcing the 'stranger within/invisibility' stereotype of East Asians (as 'Chinese' subsumes categories of 'East Asians') in the UK. This is held in tension with mediated assumptions that Chinese migrants arrive *legally* ('the Chinese weren't coming in that way'), reflecting on popular geopolitical discourses of China as an economically prosperous global power, while *selectively excluding* discourses of Chinese state inequality (Pan, 2012). Ultimately, the misrecognition of Chinese irregular/illegal migration as 'strange' forcibly reduces the right for their voices to be recognised. Racialised 'invisible' discourses are also, in this case, deployed to *reinforce* 'hypervisible' discourses of the 'migrant'; in aligning the discovery with more familiar narratives of migrant flows from postcolonial countries, 'the boundaries of the familiar' (Ahmed, 2000: 7) continue to be managed, delineating 'other histories of encounter that violate and fix others in regimes of difference' (ibid: 8).

This mediated narrative of discovery presents 'action *on* migrants' (Chouliaraki and Stolić, 2019: 6), aligning with the procedure of identification by border institutions such as the police on the ground, and opening up space for more information thus action to be sought *on* the victims. Discovery of 'stranger-ness' directs the media narrative throughout, ensuring that the victims are recognised narrowly in terms of *nationality* and *race* (Chouliaraki, Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017) and recast as the unfamiliar 'stranger', even as their race is reidentified.

Racial misidentification, homogeneity, de/politicisation

Misidentification

Within the discovery narrative is the misidentification of the migrants as *Chinese* victims. Although responsibility lies with the police for prematurely releasing confirmation of the victims' race, news stories function to mediate between institutions and the public in presenting 'facts' of an event. Several excerpts demonstrate their presentation of speculation and fact as one, speaking over the Vietnamese migrants:

On Thursday, police confirmed the 39 people found dead in a lorry trailer in Essex were Chinese nationals. (The Guardian, October 24 2019)

The victims are believed to have mainly come from Fujian, a poor coastal province in south-east China. (Metro, October 25 2019)

Racial misidentification produces misrecognition in reconstructing *homogeneity* among East Asian communities, subsuming individual difference in a 'mass Other', and reinforcing hierarchies of recognition of East Asian people in alignment with cultural and geopolitical importance. Already victim to 'passing' as Chinese in everyday encounters (Barber, 2015), this serves to exclude and substitute Vietnamese people from British public consciousness, and to silence the specific sociohistorical contexts driving vulnerable Vietnamese people towards illegal paths to migration. In news articles with a humanitarian frame, such as in the Guardian, this also serves to discredit the work that journalists do to publicise mistreatment of 'Chinese' migrants by border institutions. This does not mean Vietnamese migrants face dissimilar structural inequalities to Chinese migrants, but that misidentification constructs a distorted perception of who the victims were and the challenges they faced, denying their political voice and casting them ever more as the 'stranger'.

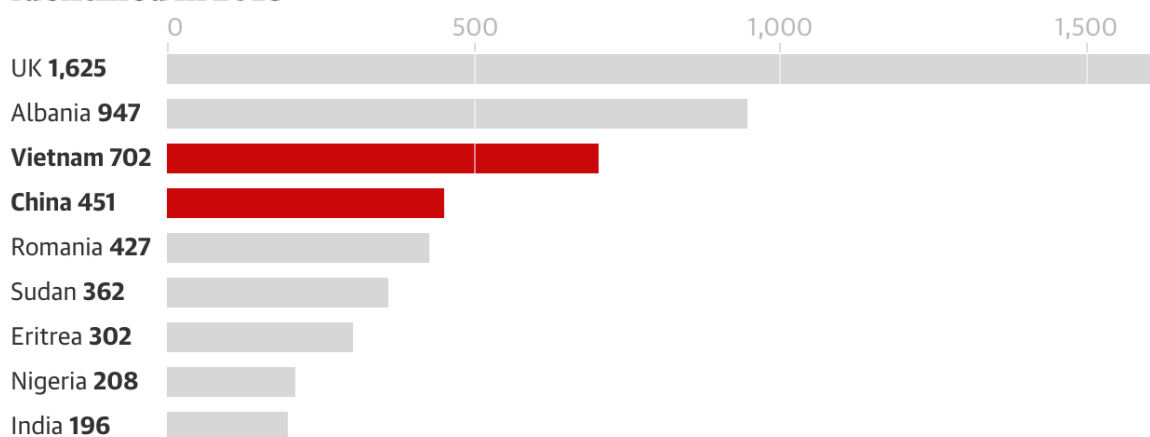
As the picture on the ground regarding the victims' identities shifted, authors very rarely questioned earlier mistakes. The absence of acknowledgement of prior misidentification legitimises the *acceptability* of racial misrecognition across public, media and institutional spheres. This

misrecognition ensured Vietnamese migrants remained invisible, strange and separated from the social imaginary of the 'migrant', despite being made 'visible' through their identification.

Visual homogenisation

Racial homogenisation appears visually, via a statistical chart implying togetherness (Figure 1):

Vietnam and China were the the third and fourth most common countries from which potential victims of slavery in the UK were identified in 2018



Guardian graphic | Source: National Crime Agency, Annual report on modern slavery 2018

Figure 1: Chart featured in The Guardian, October 24 2019

Peculiarly, the visual highlighting of both China and Vietnam and their grouping together as common countries for 'victims of slavery' in the image's caption works *against* the language confirming the victims as Chinese. The image thus conveys – even if not expressed linguistically – that China and Vietnam are in *some way* similar countries with the same social 'problem' of trafficking, reinforcing and constructing their homogeneity through absence of explanations on why they should be perceived as similar, or dissimilar to other listed countries like Albania. Ultimately, the same statistic from the National Crime Agency appears in articles confirming the victims as Chinese *or* Vietnamese to highlight discovery of the Chinese or Vietnamese trafficking 'problem', indicating its strategic deployment to bolster homogenising narratives, while misrecognising the unique factors underpinning trafficking in each country.

De/politicised discourses

Narratives around Chinese migration appear to draw upon different, politicised discourses compared to Vietnamese migration:

Although China is believed to be a major source of both victims of human trafficking as well as traffickers, little is known about the activity. There are few Chinese non-governmental organisations working on the issue and some critics say the Chinese government has shown little appetite for addressing the problem. (The Guardian, October 24 2019)

The Snakeheads, who specialise in people smuggling, are so-called because those who wish to get out of China illegally need guidance as they 'twist and turn' to find ways around border controls [...] 'The people in containers will be the poor who are unable to get visas [...] so they have resorted to paying people smugglers.' (Daily Mail, October 24 2019)

These excerpts contrast with the prior homogenisation by reproducing discourses of the Chinese government as dehumanising and uncaring towards its citizens in implicit contrast to the UK (Pan, 2012) and 'producing' trafficked victims/criminals who evoke suffering. Meanwhile, Vietnam occupies a more culturally and geopolitically *unfamiliar* position to the UK, with representations relying instead on singular tropes of the 'nail bar' or 'cannabis farms' as sites of illegal migration:

Both suspected victims are from Ha Tinh, an impoverished province where many illegal workers come from [...] gangs are thought to have trafficked thousands of migrants with many forced to work in nail bars or cannabis farms. (Metro, October 26 2019)

The relatively depoliticised Vietnamese figure does not mean recognition is achieved. On the contrary, both representations of Chinese and Vietnamese trafficking/smuggled subjects rely on reproducing moral narratives of gangs manipulating vulnerable, poor migrants to 'make the unfamiliar seem familiar' (Bekowitz, 2011: 209), thus simplifying nuances of Vietnamese (or Chinese) migrant journeys.

Whether geopolitical or depoliticised, these narratives fix victims' suffering within 'their' cultural difference or poverty, regenerating Orientalist 'Yellow Peril' discourses around malevolent East

Asian gangs (Barber, 2018) to shift responsibility for exploitation from states and governments to foreign subjects (Blume, 2015: 19), or conversely to blame foreign governments. The imaginary of the 'threat', expanded below, can be substituted across time, space, *and* different racial subjects to dehumanise and keep migrants within the imaginary of the non-human 'Other' (Chouliaraki and Stolić, 2019: 4). Ultimately, both de/politicised discourses are underpinned by 'geopolitical, economic or cultural articulations' (Chouliaraki, Georgiou, and Zaborowski, 2017: 18) denying migrant recognition.

Victimhood/threat

Victims

The tropes of the migrant 'victim', those found dead, and the 'threat', migrants implicated in smuggling/trafficking the victims across borders, proved pervasive. The victims' 'bare life' is emphasised via descriptions of their suffering:

The victims were discovered naked, or with minimal clothing, and had been desperately 'banging on the doors' for help and had 'foam coming from their mouths'. (Daily Mail, October 26 2019)

There are fears they could have been locked in the freezing trailer for days or suffocated. (Metro, October 25 2019)

The graphic descriptions of their struggles for survival and restriction from resources that sustain life (*'suffocated', 'naked', 'minimal clothing'*), function to misrecognise and reduce the migrants' active being to desperately needing (and failing) to be saved by humanitarian aid (Agamben, 1998). The situating of the victims within a linguistic regime of 'biological life' (Chouliaraki and Stolić, 2019), outside of law and excluded from humanity, generates 'generalised pity' (Boltanski, 1999: 13) from the spectator observing suffering at a distance but, due to the Vietnamese migrants' decontextualisation from the causes of their suffering, to be unable to act on it (Chouliaraki and Stolić, 2019: 7).

Threats

Meanwhile, smugglers and traffickers are described by experts as criminals forcibly exploiting migrants:

“They may be picked up at the airport here and then taken straight to a brothel or restaurant where they are forced to work,” she (Sulaiha Ali, of Duncan Lewis Solicitors) said.
“Traffickers exploit them.” (The Guardian, October 24 2019)

Working with representations of victimhood, the use of expert voices bolsters perceptions of smuggling/trafficking as a criminal issue within the postcolonial discourse of humanitarian securitisation, diverting attention towards combating criminal threats at the border (Pajnik, 2010: 49; Chouliaraki and Stolić, 2019: 7). Importantly, both victims and threats are the same race, emphasising that the Vietnamese migrant may only be misrecognised in tandem as victims or threats, but ‘not as a human’ (Chouliaraki, Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017: 9). This is most pertinent considering that the smuggler convicted was a White British man, whose participation is obfuscated in favour of racialised coverage of ‘foreign’ smugglers.

The lorry as a conditional site of victimhood



Figure 2: Daily Mail, October 24 2019



Figure 3: Metro, October 26 2019

Part of the vocabularies of victimhood/threat is the photograph of the lorry. This functions to either serve as visual depictions of previous tragedies discussed in articles, situating the ‘migrant’ within narratives of suffering (Figure 2) or portraying the criminal scene within graphic written descriptions of migrants’ last moments (Figure 3), connecting their experiences with a physical space of bare life. A shared sign is the presence of unidentifiable policemen; the foregrounding of police figures connotes the scenes as crimes, doubly *performing* the illegality of smuggling and protection via border institutions (securitisation) and the tragic murder of powerless victims (humanitarianism). This storytelling is inscribed in wider discourse of spaces of transition *between* borders, or ‘limbo spaces’ (Yuval-Davis *et al.*, 2019: 23). Migrants in limbo spaces become ‘an embodiment of the border itself’ (ibid) – unable to be recognised as legitimate citizens who ‘belong’ within the border nor as an active migrant.

Importantly, the ‘politics of visibility’ (Ibrahim and Howarth, 2016: 4) of the lorry as a limbo space in news representations is conditional on shifting territorial bordering regimes, and how they frame migrant crossings: the lorry can be seen as carrying the ‘bare life’ of victims within the spectacle of suffering and pity, or intertextually as the carrier of criminals intent on passing borders, naturalising the in/outside of borders (De Genova, 2015). As the first visual symbol within the mediated encounter of the migrants crossing the border and paying with their lives, the lorry is fundamental in situating

the Vietnamese migrants within the ambivalence of victimhood/threat and misrecognising the migrant as outside human law, reinscribing their status as the non-belonging Other.

The permanency of victimhood/threat

As demonstrated by the range of excerpts and images, the representational trope of victimhood/threat is pervasive, applied uniformly across different time periods, events, and ideologically opposing media outlets (e.g. the Guardian and the Daily Mail). Its permanency obfuscates the agency of 'victims' who may have intended to travel to the UK, or the domestic smugglers working with 'foreign threats'. This is not to say the Vietnamese migrants' deaths are *not* a crime producing victims. However, the overt focus on its foreign criminality helps to disguise the complex socio-historical and economic causes of agentic migrants' experiences of suffering – such as the reduced paths to legal migration and stricter border controls. Most importantly, victims' voices are glaringly absent within these representations. Instead the victims' stories were represented via 'experts', human rights lawyers, police or charities whom may claim to advocate for them, but may also reinforce victimhood/threat binaries.

Stretching of 'ideal victim' boundaries

Initial misrecognitions

The 'stranger-ness' of the victims makes way for their portrayal as the 'ideal trafficking victim'. Articles across the time period contain anecdotes from experts about the 'kind' of victim typically involved in the same tragedy, specifically young children and women:

In the intervening years, the Snakeheads have branched out supplying young women, who are often kidnapped and forced into the sex trade in Britain. (Daily Mail, October 24 2019)

It is revealing the sheer number of young people, the 10 teenagers, who died. Children and teenagers have an exacerbated vulnerability, they are under the thumb of the trafficking network that is controlling them. (The Guardian, November 8 2019)

These excerpts are inscribed in sexual humanitarian discourses, ensuring that women sold into the sex industry are highlighted at the expense of both men and women in labour, or male sex workers (Pajnik, 2010: 48). This legitimises the need for ‘militarised humanitarianism’ (Bernstein, 2010), the protection of vulnerable women and children via law enforcement. Moreover, the use of expert voices in this case serve to make invisible that anti-trafficking advocates may themselves reproduce notions of and work within the skewed imaginary of the ‘ideal victim’ (O’Brien, 2012).

Pham Thi Tra My

Interestingly, the misrecognition of the migrants as ideal trafficking victims becomes *more* pervasive as more information arises of the victims’ identities. At the time that a young, female migrant was speculated to be a victim, all articles overtly focused on her:

Suspected victim Pham Thi Tra My, 26, from Vietnam sent her mother a series of harrowing messages telling her she 'loved her' and was 'dying because she couldn't breathe' in the moments before her death, her family have claimed. (Daily Mail, October 25 2019)

Police confirmed that Pham Thi Tra My, the 26-year-old who sent text messages to her family to tell them she was dying, was among the dead. ““I’m sorry Mum. My journey abroad hasn’t succeeded. Mum, I love you so much! I’m dying because I can’t breathe,” Pham wrote. (The Guardian, October 8 2019)

However, the family of a Vietnamese woman who sent tragic texts to her mum saying she ‘couldn’t breathe’ told local media she was one of the 39 migrants found dead. (Metro, November 4 2019)

Articles repeated Pham’s age, gender, and powerless vulnerability, as expressed through her inability to ‘breathe’. This phrase, quoted from Pham’s last texts, could be seen as humanising but is also intensely graphic and underlines the ‘bare life’ of her last moments. Used in tandem with the wider narrative, she appeals to a narrow sense of humanitarian pity for the ‘ideal victim’. Considering that the final list of victims published in a few articles demonstrates diverse ages and genders – representing men and the oldest victim being 44 – Pham’s story and the eventual realisation of her

being one of the victims is *centralised*, ensuring that other victims are selectively excluded from recognition. Indeed, although the image and story of Nguyen Dinh Luong, a young man, is shown alongside Pham in three of the nine articles, the articles prioritise Pham's story and reify her victimhood.

The following photograph of Pham (Figure 4) also became an 'iconic' symbol of the incident, repeated more frequently than any other image across the articles:



Figure 4: Selfie featured in Daily Mail (October 27/November 2 2019), The Guardian (October 25/November 8 2019), Metro (October 25/November 4 2019)

The selfie, in alignment with the text, not only visually conveys who Pham is but enables the visual performativity of her ideal victimhood (Chouliaraki, 2017) and gendered norms of femininity (Butler, 1990), with a flower in her hair, her lipstick bright pink to contrast her white clothing and her feminine pose engendering an uncontested and 'idealised personification of innocence and loss' (Greer, 2017: 17). The positioning of the selfie as an iconic symbol of Pham's ideal victimhood not only drives highly affective responses, but serves to freeze and memorialise Pham in time for 'our' gazes rather than recognising Pham as an agentic actor whose selfie had been produced *prior* to the event as a self-representation (Greer, 2017: 18; Chouliaraki, 2017).

Finally, it is important to consider that despite an overt focus on the vulnerability of certain ‘trafficking victims’, several of the 39 migrants – including Pham – were smuggled. Cycling back to the Guardian excerpt at the start of this section, it is clear that the focus *remains* on the ‘forces of trafficking’ even after stories of their smuggling arise. The permanency of the ‘ideal trafficking victim’ is thus seen within the conflation of those who are trafficked, smuggled, irregular, or forced simplifying the complexity of their migrant journeys (Mai, 2018). Rather than engaging with the Vietnamese migrants’ stranger-ness, invisibility and diversity – in short, their occupying of ‘non-ideal’ victimhood – and situating their intentions to migrate in specific contexts of subordination/conditional agency (Mai, 2018), the articles work in *contention* by ‘stretching’ ideal victim boundaries around the 39 migrants. This ultimately denies them the ability to be recognised outside of narrow conceptions of ideal victimhood.

Potentialities for recognition

The migrants were predominantly misrecognised within frames of victimhood, contingent on their interactions with the border. However, returning to their socio-historically specific invisibility and unfamiliarity – both in comparison to the ‘familiar’ proximity of Chinese migrants, or the hypervisible ‘otherness’ of UK South Asian and African-Caribbean communities (Yuval-Davis, Anthias, and Kofman, 2005; Erel *et al.*, 2016) – reveals possibilities for engaging in ‘more complex conceptions’ (Chouliaraki and Orgad, 2011: 346). Conceptions can move past dominant representations partly because the UK news media had not *encountered* Vietnamese migrants before, and partly because Vietnamese families gradually took action to *be recognised* as having voices of value in encounters amidst the misrecognitions of the unfamiliar/invisible smuggling victims as familiar/visible Chinese trafficking victims. This enabled narrow spaces of recognition of their conditional agency (Chouliaraki and Stolić, 2019), two of which are discussed here: texts and selfies, and representations of grieving families.

The publicising of texts and selfies

Where voices are typically excluded and migrant stories narrowly describe migrants only by their country of origin (Chouliaraki, Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017: 19), the families of the suspected

Vietnamese victims were able to publish their children's names, images, messages and reasons for migrating in the news:

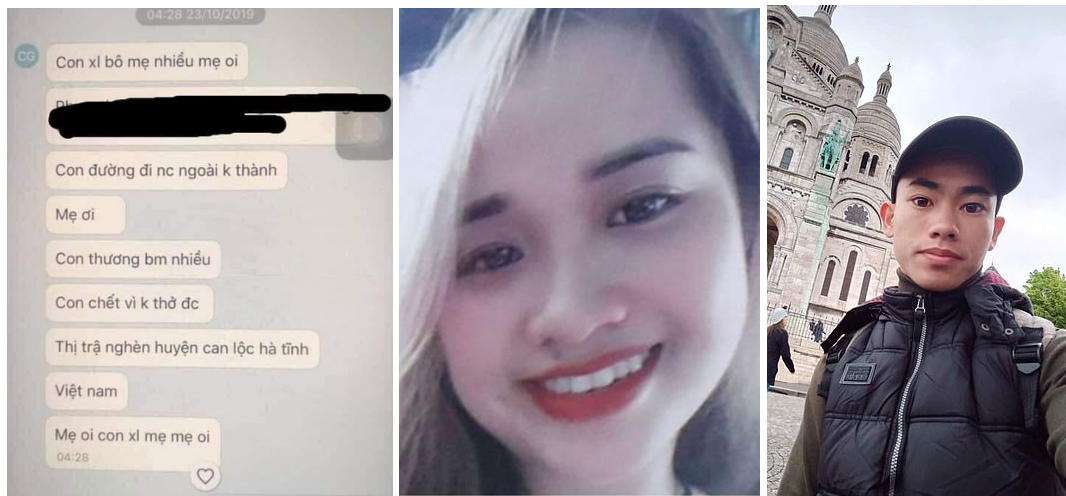


Figure 5: (Left) Photo of Pham's text messages, Guardian (October 26 2019)

Figure 6: (Centre) Selfie of Anna Bui Thi Nhung, Daily Mail (October 26 2019)

Figure 7: (Right) Selfie of Nyugen Dinh Luong, Daily Mail (October 26 2019), Guardian (November 2/8 2019), Metro (November 4 2019)

The remediation of several migrants' own words (Figure 5) and faces (Figure 6, Figure 7), despite having passed away, enables intimate insight into their journeys and humanises the migrants visually, by showing individual images of each victim (Figure 6, Figure 7), and linguistically, by giving them voice (Orgad, 2012). Thus 'we' are able to realise that many of the victims felt it was necessary to travel to the UK for work to reduce their families' economic suffering, echoing Mai's (2016) conceptions of contextual agency within bounds of exploitation. Victims of different genders, ages and motivations are given agency, resisting the dominant, gendered imaginary of the 'ideal victim'; challenging multiple voices speaking over them; and enabling 'our' imaginations to empathetically open up to the migrants' everyday lives (Orgad, 2012). Indeed, in one article the journey of a suspected victim, Anna, is narrated through publicising her social media posts:

On October 21, days before her family lost contact with her and the news of the doomed shipping container emerged, Nhung wrote in a Facebook post: 'Being grown up means having to hide your sadness in the dark, and keeping a smile on your face.'

Beside a stock image of two children flying kites at sunset, she posted: 'As I grow up, I see that life is not as peaceful as I used to think. When I grow up, I want to go back to my childhood, when I lived freely'.

By late October, Nhung was in Belgium. She posted photos of herself, again with a cup of bubble tea in her hand, excitedly exploring the sights of Brussels. (Daily Mail, October 25 2019)

These excerpts showcase the 'ordinariness' (Chouliaraki and Stolić, 2019: 10) of Anna's everyday experiences within her *specific* relations of subordination/agency, shaping 'capacity for identification' (ibid) with her and recognising her as human. The texts and selfies shared by families thus have the potential to become affective, as well as literal, actions *by* migrants that resist conceptions of their 'bare life' and affect us through inspiring 'empathetic duty' (ibid).

However, it is important to consider that the staging of the self changes when inserted into broader institutional structures for response by Western spectators (Chouliaraki, 2017: 10), recontextualised to enable news stories to portray them as objects in need of 'our' sympathy. Indeed, while the 39 migrants are given voice they are typically described as 'dreaming of a better life' in the UK; the Eurocentric imaginaries of individualistic dreams (Orgad, 2012) reproduces the colonial self-presentation of the UK as a 'haven of human rights' (Erel *et al.*, 2016) while obfuscating the UK government's management and exclusion of migrant bodies once migrants arrive (which indeed, led to the migrants' deaths). Their recognition is conditional on being recognised as 'someone like us', or in this case, 'someone who wants to be like us', stopping short of 'self-assertion' as contextualised political actors who act 'against the very border powers that injured them' (Chouliaraki and Stolić, 2019: 15).

Family voices



Figure 8: Photos of family members, Daily Mail (October 27 2019)

In publicising their children's struggles, the voices and images (Figure 8) of grieving *families* are also given space:

'The smugglers said that this was a ... safe route, that people would go by airplane, car ... if I had known she would go by this route, I would not have let her go,' Pham added. (Daily Mail, October 26 2019)

In the post, her brother added: "She was arrested a few days ago by UK police and they returned her to France. Now we heard that she might have died. I am posting to ask for her whereabouts and if you tell me your projection about her situation." (The Guardian, October 25 2019)

The highly affective visual images of individual parents and narratives of anguished relatives desperately searching for information and expressing their regrets and contemplations, similarly work to appeal to the capacity for Western audiences to empathise and identify with them (Chouliaraki and Stolić, 2019: 10). The families' recollections of their children's journeys challenge the frames of 'illegality' that are mentioned in their stories ('she was arrested', 'the smugglers said...'), towards a 'common humanity' that familial parent-children bonds attests to.

Nonetheless, working in the bounds of humanitarian securitisation, such stories may end up reinforcing the ambivalence of victimhood/threat (Chouliaraki and Stolić, 2019: 10). Here,

'Vietnamese culture' is used to explain why family members chose to send their children through these paths, implicating them in blame for their children's deaths (Blume, 2015: 19). Moreover, the voices of institutions and experts are foregrounded ahead of family voices to discuss the implications of identification for victims' families and domestic/international crime, emphasising that border politics are an irreducible part of the illegality of migrant journeys. Ultimately, these stories fail to recognise *why* these families' suffering matters in order to engender political action.

CONCLUSION

The 39 Vietnamese victims symbolised 'strangers within' British public consciousness: despite being the third most common nationality trafficked into the UK, Vietnamese migrants have been largely excluded from collective imaginaries of the 'migrant'. Understanding this incident and speculation of their identities as a mediated encounter (Zaborowski and Georgiou, 2019) and site of possibility inscribed in postcolonial legacies, this research critically examined the ways news representations mis/recognised the 39 victims; how mis/recognitions changed over the period of coverage; and how tensions played out between discourses of the 'invisible' Vietnamese figure and 'hypervisible' migrant. It thereby aimed to bridge conceptions of mis/recognition within racial, migrant, bordering, and trafficking representations.

Through a multimodal critical analysis of nine news articles covering the incident, this dissertation has firstly argued that recognition is delineated and narrowly defined by linguistic and visual constructs of race/nationality, victim/threat and the 'ideal trafficking victim' (Kinnvall, 2015: 153), consistent with findings in the literature. The permanency of the victim/threat binary was produced in part through the racialised imaginary of the East Asian subject exploited by the foreign 'threat', applied uniformly to Chinese and Vietnamese subjects and working in tandem with shifting border regimes that reconstructed the lorry as a space of transition contingent on their 'bare life' to identify them as victims. Alongside the invisibilised and homogenised misrecognition of their racial identity, the stretching of 'ideal trafficking victim' boundaries enabled the diverse ages, genders and stories of

the 39 victims to be simplified, depoliticised and decontextualised, reducing recognition of the right to speak on their own terms (Phillips, 2003). The specificities of these frames of mis/recognition, such as their 'stranger-ness' and homogeneity, shifted and waned across the coverage as more information on their identities arose, indicating the 'unfixity' and instability of meanings ascribed to the migrant subject.

The perceived 'newness' of the East Asian illegal migrant subject also ascribed '*stranger-ness*' to their bodies. While this initially positioned them outside the bounds of belonging of both 'the migrant' and 'our' communities, the unfamiliarity of the Vietnamese figure later led to Vietnamese families taking action to be recognised as voices of value: the publication of selfies, texts and family grief showcases the victims' 'conditional agency' as actors taking steps to protect their families. These 'actions *by* migrants' (Chouliaraki and Stolić, 2019) have the potential to enact recognition of migrant voice and appeal to empathetic duty, albeit fall short of recognising the victims' political agency.

This constant playing with the imaginaries of their unfamiliar 'stranger-ness' and victimhood/threat demonstrates the ambivalent conditions of recognition for Vietnamese migrant: within the boundaries of who a 'migrant' looks and acts like to 'us' or as a stranger, holding Vietnamese migrants in place outside bounds of belonging. In critically analysing these news representations, this dissertation has sought to expose the *double invisibility* of certain migrant groups. It asks 'us', the Western audience and journalists, to re-examine our imaginaries towards migrant others. For many, this may have been their 'initial mediated encounter' with Vietnamese migrants because of the very sociohistorical conditions that have rendered them excluded from the political arena. Rather than recast them as strangers or attempt to stretch the boundaries of misrecognition to manage them, it is crucial to acknowledge not only their individual selves but the myriad of factors that have led to their arrival in the UK (Silverstone, 2006: 8) – not asking 'who are they' but 'what leads them here?' This opens up potentialities for migrants such as the Vietnamese victims to be recognised as agentic political actors, their different political voice to 'us', *and* different to other 'distant others', equally valued.

This research only focuses on an isolated case study of Vietnamese migrants, limiting conclusions to representations of the 39 victims. Future research should seek to systematically consolidate these

findings across textual and visual representations of Vietnamese migrants/residents in the UK, further challenging dominant frames of misrecognition across Western media. Specifying how discourses of migrant 'stranger-ness' (conceptualising this as *beyond* invisibility) and 'hypervisibility' are held in tension within representations of other marginalised groups can also serve as a usual conceptual tool to identify potentialities for mis/recognition. Finally, Vietnamese communities in the UK remain neglected in the media and in media studies; locating them within their specific contexts and enabling them to speak on their own terms is thus crucial in expanding understanding of their experiences, and recognising them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is dedicated to the teachers who have made an impact on me throughout my time in academia:

Miss Golding, who despite her disappointment that I was not pursuing English at university, understood that I wished to learn widely about the world.

Dr. Mary Beltran, who encouraged my thoughts on East Asian television representations and first introduced me to the idea of pursuing postgraduate study.

Professor Jennifer Hudson, supervisor of my undergraduate dissertation on social media at UCL, who pushed me towards pursuing a Master's degree and helped me to secure a place at LSE.

Professor Shani Orgad, who gave me the tools to discuss global media representations of migrants critically and with nuance, and helped me construct my initial ideas for this dissertation.

The biggest thank you to Professor Myria Georgiou, the supervisor of this dissertation, for discussing my ideas of representation and recognition with respect and patience, and always encouraging me to answer my own questions. Thank you for guiding me throughout a tumultuous writing process.

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APPENDICES

List of sample texts used

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ISSN: 1474-1938/1946