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Premediation and white affect: climate change and migration in critical perspective

Andrew Baldwin

This paper extends existing debate about the relationship between climate change and migration by locating this debate within the registers of race and difference. The paper argues that the discourse on climate change and migration generates a particular racial orientation to climate change called 'white affect'. To make this argument, the paper connects up two related phenomena: racial neoliberalism and the relationship between affect and biopower. The white affect of climate change and migration discourse is here understood to be an 'object-target' of biopolitics. White affect thus becomes an important concept for understanding how racial neoliberalism functions through affective proxy.

Key words climate change; migration; race; neoliberalism; affect

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A thing is concretely where and what it is – for example a successfully shot arrow sticking in a target – when it is in a state of arrest. (Massumi 2002, 6)

That's the very issue: how to identify racisms when their terms of account – both of identification and documentation, of expression and critical intervention – have been rendered invisible? (Goldberg 2010, 92)

Introduction

*Postcards from the future*¹ is a collection of magical realist photography that exhibited at the Museum of London and later at the National Theatre in 2010–11. It is comprised of 16 large-format, back-lit transparencies, all of which depict London under various conditions of climate change. In one image, Buckingham Palace is engulfed by a vast informal settlement. In another, the double glazing in London's famous Gherkin is draped with drying laundry. In a third, Parliament Square is transformed into a rice paddy, worked on by hunched over workers and a yoked water buffalo. And in a fourth image, a family of Jaipur monkeys overlook the flooded Thames from their refuge atop St Paul's. Race is nowhere stated in these images and yet they scream race: the icons of Britishness, of whiteness – monarch, capital, parliament and church – overrun by hordes of nameless climate migrants.

These images, along with the other 12 images in the exhibition, are immensely provocative. They speak directly to a current cultural fascination in advanced

liberal democracies with climate change futures and impacts. And they project these futures onto one of the most iconic cities in the world. For a brief moment, these images allow their viewers to reimagine what London might look like under conditions of climate change, and no doubt for some the images are a call to forestall the irreversible social impacts of climate change. In this paper, however, I use them as an occasion to locate the cultural politics of climate change within the register of race and difference. What these images reveal is a form of racialisation specific to the cultural context of climate change, an affective condition of 'whiteness' that emerges out of the relation between present and future, actual and virtual. The central claim advanced here is that the discourse on migration and climate change of which these images form a part functions as a kind of security apparatus, one that generates a particular racial orientation to the phenomenon of climate change, an orientation I refer to as 'white' affect. In advancing this claim, this paper seeks to make a distinctive contribution to the expanding debate about climate change and migration. The phenomenon of climate change-induced migration is commonly viewed as an urgent problem that demands various solutions, whereas the argument advanced in this paper is that when articulated as a problem of migration, climate change acquires racial connotations. Attention to white affect can help clarify how. The concept of affect has gained considerable popularity across the social sciences and humanities in recent years (e.g. Gregg and Seigworth 2010), where it is broadly conceived as a body's capacity to affect or to be

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affected (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, xvi). Affect and the related concept of white affect are explained in greater detail later.

To make this argument, the paper connects up two related phenomena: the persistence of race thinking primarily in advanced liberal democracies (Amin 2011; Goldberg 2009; Stoler 1995), and the relations between affect and biopower (Anderson 2012; Hook 2005 2007). Affect is central to the argument because it can help us understand the persistence of race thinking in our supposedly 'post-racial' times. This is because affect need not be spoken to have an effect. Through affect, we can better appreciate how racial sensibilities are mobilised for political purposes without the vocabulary of race ever being mentioned (Hook 2007). It can also help us understand how such sensibilities circulate within the wider context of climate change politics. My use of affect to account for the contemporary persistence of race thinking is consistent with what Goldberg (2009 2010) describes as racial neoliberalism (see also Roberts and Mahtani 2010). Racial neoliberalism is a paradoxical social formation. It is one in which the existence of structural and institutional racisms are routinely denied, while at the same time one in which racisms persist as fully privatised yet unstated, invisible expressions. Goldberg (2009, 360) describes racial neoliberalism as the condition of 'racisms without racism'. One claim this paper seeks to make is that inasmuch as the discourse on migration and climate change functions as an apparatus of white affect, it resembles racial neoliberalism. The discourse is racial while shorn of any explicit reference to race.

The second phenomenon from which the argument draws concerns the relation between affect and biopower (Anderson 2012). Glossing Foucault, neoliberalism is a form of biopolitical rule concerned with securing the conditions through which a population might live freely. As a form of rule, neoliberalism seeks to govern life using market rationality, especially intersubjective competition. Those who accommodate themselves to this rationality are said to live freely, whereas those who do not are simply left to fend for themselves, die or be killed (Dillon and Reid 2009). In tracing out the multiple relations between affect and biopower, Ben Anderson (2012) argues that neoliberalism relies on numerous affective conditions that promote neoliberal freedoms, in particular, state-phobia, the condition of fearing excessive state rule. Importantly, for Anderson such affective conditions are constituted by apparatuses of security, which from Foucault we understand to be 'a matter of a certain manipulation of relations of forces', 'always inscribed in a play of power, but [...] also always linked to certain coordinates of knowledge which issue from it, but to an equal degree condition it' (Foucault 1980, 196). What Anderson gives us then is the idea that security

apparatuses are deployed to cultivate particular affects in the wider interests of securing neoliberal freedoms. Or as he puts it, 'the affective life of individuals and collectives is an "object-target of" and "condition for" contemporary forms of biopower' (2012, 28–9), particularly biopolitics. By connecting up Goldberg's notion of racial neoliberalism with Anderson's provocative insights on the affective dimensions of biopower, the paper shows how the white affect associated with climate change and migration discourse functions as a form of racial power.

By establishing white affect as my main theoretical point of reference, my argument departs from the dominant way of conceiving of race as an effect of signification. Instead, it owes more to Arun Saldanha's observation that

white racism [needs] to be conceived as a system of involving not just exclusion, but more complex shades of differentiation and interaction *prior to* any distinction between self and other, West and East. (2007, 8)

As such, my suggestion is that 'white affect' functions *prior to* the representation of race and whiteness, prior to the differentiation of bodies. In this sense, white affect is not a specific social formation, but an intensity or fealty, a relation between motion and rest, between process and its cessation. It is a relation that sits outside the material organisation of life, yet remains fundamental to it as its immaterial counterpart (Bennett 2010). And here, I should add that when I refer to white affect as functioning prior to white representation, my intention is not to naturalise either white affect, race or whiteness; affect is itself a relation of power (Anderson 2012). And finally I should add that while there is a sort of universality to the white affect I describe, this should not be taken to mean that whiteness is a singular or cohesive form of embodiment. Indeed, as a form of subjectivity whiteness is widely understood to be as highly differentiated as are the racisms that it enacts (Dyer 1997; Saldanha 2007; Wiegman 1999).

The paper begins with an introduction to the rapidly expanding discourse on climate change and migration, followed by a section explaining how the discourse on climate change and migration functions as a technology of white affect. The next section then draws some general connections between racial neoliberalism, affect and biopower, which are then used in the penultimate section to reinterpret climate change and migration discourse as a form of racial power. At this point it is worth mentioning that the argument does not set out to 'prove' that climate change and migration discourse is racist. Such a 'proof' would be impossible to make. Instead, the paper should be read as an attempt to chart the presence of racial power in a discourse shorn of any explicit mention of race. In this way, the paper responds

to Goldberg's challenge set out in the paper's second epigram. I offer 'white affect' as a concept that can help us identify the presence of race in a discourse that otherwise renders race invisible. The paper concludes with some reflections on how the argument relates to wider discussions about climate change and the political (Wainwright and Mann 2015), climate justice and the politics of geographic knowledge.

Climate change and migration

Migration is by now a standard theme in climate change discourse, where the assumption is often made that climate change will affect existing patterns of migration in some way. Migration finds expression in recent decisions taken by the UNFCCC (Warner 2012) and in recent statements on climate change from the European Commission (European Commission 2013), as well as in a profusion of books, articles and media. The relationship between migration and global environmental change, including climate change, was also the subject of a major research initiative commissioned by the UK Government, the results of which were published in 2011 as *Foresight: migration and global environmental change final project report 2011*; hereafter the *UK Foresight Report*). More immediately for the discipline of Geography, the final report that resulted from this initiative was the topic of the opening plenary at the annual conference of the Royal Geographical Society–Institute for British Geographers in 2013. Precisely when and how migration first emerged as an element in climate change discourse is difficult to pinpoint. Some trace the emergence of a discourse on climate change-induced migration, or the notion of climate refugees,² to the emergence of a 'climate security' discourse in mid-late 2000s (Hartmann 2010; White 2011). This was a period that saw the United Nations Security Council debate climate change for the first time (Detraz and Betsill 2009). It was also a period that saw the publication of a series of high-profile policy reports in the USA on the national security implications of climate change (Campbell *et al.* 2007; CNA 2007). However, while it may be true that the mid-late 2000s were an important juncture in the gathering debate about *climate change* and migration, we can also safely say that contemporary concerns about climate change-induced migration merely repeat longer standing anxieties about migration and *environmental change*. Indeed, arguments about migration and environmental change were well underway in the mid-1980s and 1990s (Black 2001; El-Hinnawi 1985; Myers and Kent 1995; Suhrke 1994; for a good summary of these early debates see Morrissey 2012). Similarly, the pronouncements of Lester Brown and Paul Ehrlich in the 1970s contain a similar set of anxieties, as do those of William Vogt in the late 1940s (Saunders 2000). No

doubt, we could trace the genealogy of these pronouncements further into the past. So rather than set the record straight about the origins of the discourse on climate change and migration, let me instead highlight aspects of the discourse that will be pertinent for our later discussion.

The most important of these concerns the way in which the figure of the climate change migrant – but also the climate refugee, environmental refugee and environmental migrant – is narrated as a threat to social order. This is such an entrenched way of speaking about migration that it hardly needs elaborating. Suffice to say this narrative often takes the form of 'they will catalyse political violence' or 'they will usurp our resources'. Here, the figure of the climate migrant, like any migrant, is figured as alien to some already apparently cohesive social body, which means that the discourse trades on a distinction between 'us' and 'them'. This distinction is often assumed to coincide with the inside/outside of territorially delimited national borders, as in many of the imaginaries pictured in *Postcards from the future*. But discourses on *internal* migration can also carry connotations of 'us' and 'them'. Indeed, the point is often made that under conditions of climate change migration will more than likely be temporary and internal rather than transboundary (Laczko and Aghazarm 2009). So, if my first point is that the climate migrant is often figured through tropes of disorder and violence, then we should not assume that such disorder is always imagined exclusively as an international disorder in which the migrant overflows the territorial boundaries of the state. Rather, we need to understand that this disorder is also imagined as internal to the bounded territorial state. In turn, what this suggests is that in the discourse on climate change and migration, the climate migrant is best conceived as the excess of the state, or more accurately that which exceeds the social order that the state is empowered to enforce.

Another important aspect of the discourse concerns its temporality. Almost without exception the migration effects of climate change are narrated in the future tense (Baldwin 2012 2013). Migration, we are regularly told, is a phenomenon that either *will* or *may be* amplified under conditions of climate change. Conversely, when climate change-induced migration is said to be occurring in the present, such claims immediately run up against the observation that migration is irreducible to environmental factors alone, a point migration scholars have been making since at least the mid-1990s (Black 2001; Suhrke 1994). Environmental factors may contribute to migration decisions but never determine migration, since migration decisions are always the result of a far more complex set of structural conditions, such as labour markets, land tenure and political context. Consequently, identifying someone in

the present as a climate migrant remains impossible, an argument made repeatedly throughout the academic and institutional literature on climate change and migration, including in the *UK Foresight Report* (2011) on migration and global environmental change mentioned earlier. Hence, the only appropriate grammatical form that the discourse can take is the future-conditional. *Postcards from the future* provides a good example, using the aesthetic form of magical realist photography. Other future-conditional representational forms are also readily found throughout the discourse. Perhaps the most common is the use of quantitative prediction, such as Norman Myers' claim that 200 million people will migrate due to climate change by 2050, a well-cited prediction found in various UN and governmental reports, including the famous Stern Review (Stern 2006). Other good examples include forms of predictive modelling, such as agent-based modelling (Kniveton *et al.* 2012), but also statistical regression and correlation analysis (Kniveton *et al.* 2008; McLeman 2013), the use of scenario planning evident in both military and policy texts, such as the *Age of consequences* (Campbell *et al.* 2007) and in the *UK Foresight Report* (2011), and futures mapping evident in a range of recent policy research (German Advisory Council on Global Change 2008; Warner *et al.* 2009; Werz and Conley 2012).

And a final point concerns the migrant's indeterminate quality. If identifying someone as a climate change migrant is impossible, then this impossibility poses serious difficulties for categorising the climate migrant. Simply put, no universal definition exists for a person who has or who may migrate for reasons of climatic or environmental variability. Thus, we can also say that the figure of the climate migrant is best conceived as the excess of categorisation. The figure lacks precise definition, and in this way it can never be identified as such. It can only exist virtually, no less real, but never actually materialising, never fully emerging. In its indeterminacy, the figure is monstrous and incommensurable.

Taking all three aspects together, we might say that the figure of the climate migrant is a threatening, monstrous figure from the future. No surprise then that the figure is regularly invoked to mobilise fear among various publics in support of various political programmes (Bettini 2013a 2013b; Hartmann 2010). Al Gore's Academy Award-winning film, *An inconvenient truth*, provides an excellent example of this practice, as does Michael Nash's 2010 *Climate refugees*, both of which carry a similar warning: climate change demands our political attention inasmuch as the consequences of inaction will be socially, politically, culturally and economically devastating. *Postcards from the future* falls within the same aesthetic genre. It would appear then that the discourse is conditioned primarily through an

affect of fear. And yet, recent research explicitly challenges these narratives of fear, reframing the relation between climate change and migration in more anodyne language (Baldwin 2014; Felli 2012; Methmann and Oels 2015). This new line of reasoning argues that, if properly managed, migration is not something to fear, but something to be embraced, something to desire. It claims that migration can be a legitimate adaptation response to climate change (Black *et al.* 2011a 2011b; Gemenne 2011; McLeman and Smit 2006), rather than a failure to adapt insofar as adaptive migration can improve human well-being, enhance community resilience and generate economic benefits. As such, while the discourse may appear at first glance to be solely about fear, the emergence of this new line of reasoning suggests that the affective dimension of the discourse is not so one-dimensional. Rather, it appears that the discourse is comprised of two distinctive affects: fear and desire. This also suggests that the discourse on climate change and migration may not be a single discourse after all, but in fact two distinctive discourses. My wager, however, is that on close inspection these two formulations both appear to be animated by a shared notion of fear. Fear is most apparent in instances when the migrant is said to threaten political violence. But even the more anodyne migration-as-adaptation thesis is conditioned by fear. For at its core is a desire to manage migration in the wider interest of climate change adaptation lest migration become disorderly, disruptive or chaotic (Felli 2012). In other words, the adaptation thesis implies that we should fear the consequences of unmanaged migration. Consequently, it would appear that fear is mobilised across the heterogeneous discourse on climate change and migration, differing only in its degrees of visibility and emphasis and in its material effects.

But what kind of fear is this? How might we characterise it? And what can it tell us about the discourse on climate change and migration? Betsy Hartmann provides perhaps the clearest clues when she asks why, given the empirical and methodological difficulties of wrestling the figure of the climate migrant into some sort of actual knowledge form,

have these narratives [about climate refugees] gained so much momentum? Part of the reason lies in the way they draw on deep-seated fears and stereotypes of the dark-skinned, over-breeding, dangerous poor. (2010, 238)

Inasmuch as Hartman is correct, I would suggest, however, that the affect animating the discourse is not some generic fear of the Other, nor even a fear of the racial other, but a desire to preserve the apparent normalcy of an imagined social order that the monstrous, future-conditional climate change migrant threatens to overwhelm. Not so much a fear of the

Other as an anxiety of loss when confronted by an ungovernable excess.

Premediation and affect

Premediation and affect are related concepts that can help us grasp the way that the discourse on climate change and migration functions as a technology of white affect. I address each concept in turn. Premediation is a concept used in media and communication studies to describe a form of American media logic that arose in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and that intensified in the run up to the US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003. Coined by Richard Grusin (2010), premediation is the name given to a kind of media logic that actively proliferates the number of possible future scenarios that may arise out of a given event. The purpose of premediating such futures – mediating them before they occur – is to inure publics to the shock of an event and its multiple aftermaths in advance of their occurrence. In this way, premediation functions as a kind of ‘affective prophylactic’ (Grusin 2010, 46) that prepares publics to expect any number of a range possible futures so as to ‘prevent the experience of a traumatic future’ that may take the form of a violent, aggressive military invasion, an act of terrorism or the unmanaged flow of bodies across state territories.

Grusin conceptualises premediation as a form of reasoning specific to American media landscapes after 9/11, but premediation also has explanatory value beyond these landscapes. For example, it has been used to characterise the governing logics of other risk landscapes, including the war on terror (De Goede 2008) and climate change (De Goede and Randalls 2009). Two specific elements of premediative logic are pertinent for our discussion. The first of these concerns how

premediation entails the generation of possible future scenarios or possibilities which may come true or which may not, but which work in any event to guide action (or shape public sentiment) in the present. (Grusin 2010, 47)

According to Grusin, then, what matters in premediative logic is not whether the anticipated futures are correct. Premediation is not a form of predictive reasoning. Rather, what matters is that by proliferating possible futures in advance of their occurring, premediation allows for the future to become actionable in the present (Anderson 2010; De Goede and Randalls 2009), for an action to be taken in the present based on a range of premediated futures. In this sense, premediation is not concerned with preventing premediated futures from occurring but with ensuring ‘that whatever form the future takes it will emerge only within the possible futures enabled by premediated networks of technical, social and cultural actors’ (2010, 50). So if

the first element of premediation pertinent for our discussion is that it makes the future actionable, the second is that premediation is centrally concerned with managing collective affect in a way that ensures that the future will not be experienced as a disruptive force but as a fully expected, even logical, outcome of the present. As Grusin puts it

premediation names both of these senses – the production of specific future scenarios *and* the creation and maintenance of an affective orientation towards the future, a sense of continuity or the feeling of assurance that there will not be another catastrophic surprise. (2010, 48; my emphasis)

Perhaps already we might begin to see how both elements of premediation can help us better appreciate how racialisation functions in climate change and migration discourse. As mentioned above, the phenomenon of climate change-induced migration can only be apprehended empirically through future-conditional forms of knowledge: magical realism, scenarios, statistical modelling, quantitative projections and futures mapping. One important effect of these future-conditional knowledge forms is that they are called on in order to authorise actions in the present that might be taken in order to manage rather than forestall these eventualities. The *UK Foresight Report* (2011) provides an excellent example of this aspect of premediative logic. The report is organised around a series of different future scenarios of environmental change, and the final chapter outlines a suite of policies that might be used to manage the migration effects specific to each scenario. Here, the future-conditional becomes the impetus for remaking various landscapes in the wider interest of ‘preparing for a highly uncertain future’ (2011, 190).

Premediation is also concerned with inuring publics to the possibility of future disruptions. This is also evident across climate change and migration discourse in both its national and human security variants. For example, *The age of consequences* (Campbell *et al.* 2007), which is a widely cited report on the US national security implications of climate change, holds that any number of climate change scenarios could induce a corresponding array of migration scenarios and forms of political violence. The report makes no attempt to specify how these scenarios might be prepared for. It simply poses them as a set of possibilities differentiated by their varying degrees of severity for US national security. As such, in naming these scenarios, the report ensures that whatever form migration might take in the context of climate change, it will not materialise as an unexpected emergency or disruptive event, but as a fully anticipated outcome of the present. So, too, the *UK Foresight Report* mobilises a kind of premediative reasoning, albeit slightly differently.³ In a context in which the migration effects of climate change are

regularly said to pose violent possibilities (exemplified by *The age of consequences*), the report stands out because it reframes the relationship between climate change and migration as manageable rather than as inherently conflictual. In particular, it poses migration as a legitimate adaptive response to climate change provided its excesses are carefully managed. One of its central messages is that, when properly managed, migration is nothing to fear. And so while these two texts approach the phenomenon of climate change-induced migration very differently – one is concerned with national security, the other with human security – both premediate the future by naming the migration effects of climate change in advance of their occurring and, in doing so, at least partially ensure that if and when such effects materialise, they will not register as unanticipated political emergencies but as fully anticipated outcomes of climate change. In short, what these texts do is prepare their respective audiences for the world to come. Each mediates the future before it occurs and, in this sense, each works as a kind of affective prophylactic by orienting its readership to the future through an anticipatory affect. My argument is that this affect is racial.

To explain this racialism, let me elaborate on what I mean by white affect. By affect I refer to an intensity that arises from the dynamic interplay between process and cessation (Massumi 2002), and by white affect, I refer to an intensity that prefigures and animates ‘whiteness’, an intensification or closing down of the myriad futures available to bodies in a way that confines them to a set of constraints expressed as ‘whiteness’. This requires further explanation, so let us start with the relation between process and cessation. Borrowing from the philosopher Brian Massumi (2002), process is nothing but the immanent and continuous unfolding of the totality of the world. This is a view of the world in which process is given ontological primacy over position: before position, we have process. A body in process is fully indeterminate. It has no determinate position but is instead best construed as pure potential. In this sense, a processual body retains the capacity to become anything. However, a processual body stops being a processual body the moment it takes up a position, the moment it is stabilised, the very moment it encounters its own cessation. Again, following Brian Massumi (2002), we might say that positionality is back-formed from cessation, back-formed against an end point. In this sense, when a body is back-formed against cessation it undergoes a qualitative shift from being *pure potential* to being a determinate body, a positioned body, now defined, fixed or constrained by a limited set of *possibilities*. This is not to say that the body stops moving (space and time continue to unfold); it is simply to say that the body’s movement is no longer defined by

its infinite variability. Rather, the body’s movement is now defined by an affective relation between what the body is (i.e. Black, White, gay, straight, man, women, and so on) and what it might become, between its actual (even if socially constructed) and virtual, or corporeal and incorporeal, forms. Back-formed against cessation, the body shifts from being a body in process to an intensive body. It moves from being a body marked by its potentiality, or infinite variability, to a determinate body unfolding within a framework of possibilities.

Now what I want to suggest is that white affect is a kind of intensity that arises when ‘white’ positionality is back-formed against its own cessation, the fantasy of its own death. As such, what I am suggesting is that white affect is not a processual subjectivity, nor one defined by infinite variability (even though whiteness remains highly mutable). White affect is an intensive or eventual condition of the body, an affective intensity distilled from the dynamic interplay of backformation when the infinitely variable body confronts the image of its own death.⁴ In this sense, whiteness is not formed from the discursive interplay of citationary conventions, nor is it about skin. It is, rather, the fantasy of originality, an affective condition, fealty or intensity prior to difference, if by difference we mean asymmetry or non-resemblance. Whiteness is of course an historically produced subject position (Ahmed 2004; Bonnett 1997; Dwyer and Jones III 2000; Dyer 1997; Frankenburg 1993; Kobayashi 2003; Kobayashi and Peake 2000; Roediger 1991), and to be sure the dynamic I describe here *is* historically situated. This dynamic is also consistent with the important observation that ‘white’ is a racial identity that imagines itself as the invisible backdrop against which racial difference is made to appear as such, or what Derek Hook (2005) describes as racism’s ‘silent denominator’. My contention is simply that this phantasm is preceded by an affective intensity. Whiteness may, of course, come to ‘consolidate a series of more explicit values’ (Hook 2005) – for example, a desire for control, salvation, purity, transcendence, particularity or mutation or a desire to save – but I would suggest that these are signifying relations that derive from a prior affective intensity. Or as Hook suggests, whiteness is an ‘affective formation, a relational interplay of attractions and aversions, as a mode of subjectification that appears to exceed explicitly discursive forms’ (2005, 74).

My contention is that the significance of the discourse on climate change and migration as a premediative security apparatus lies in the way in which it orients us to the future through a white affective intensity. In this sense, then, it is incorrect to say that the discourse on climate change and migration mobilises racism to the task of combatting climate change. Racism is a value system that discriminates on

the basis of biological and cultural markers of difference, and as far as I can tell the discourse on climate change and migration has not yet been mobilised to promote racist discrimination. So rather than racism, I argue that the discourse produces a white racial orientation to climate change. By premediating a potentially disordered, heterogeneous global future in which the Other will circulate more and more, the apparatus of climate change and migration inaugurates a pre-discursive sense of the normal. But this is not some ordinary sense of the normal defined as routine, unchanging, banal or predictable. This is a normal marked by the ever-present possibility of disruption or transformation. This is a metastable normal defined by an always-present potential instability (Massumi 2009). Indeed, what the discourse does is it places some generalised notion of population, or man-as-species, in relation to the 'what-could-be'. It intensifies the normal as a relation of possible transformation, such that the population, always assumed as a coherent whole, always assumed to possess a coherent set of values, is tensed on the verge of transformation. For example, if the phenomenon of climate change-induced migration is premediated through the proliferation of stories, images or scenarios of disordered or chaotic futures in which, for example, Jaipur monkeys will occupy St Paul's Cathedral, or in which Buckingham Palace is engulfed by shanties, or in which the combined effects of climate change, Islamic fundamentalism and increasing northward migration from Nigeria to Tunisia threaten Europe's southern border,⁵ such images orient the viewer to a future in which British or European white supremacy cannot be easily guaranteed. In other words, such premediations anticipate the demise of white European supremacy. Or if by a different representational schema, such as that found in the *UK Foresight Report*, migration is said to be a legitimate form of adaptation to climate change provided it is properly managed, such a schema orients the viewer to a future in which the guarantee of white supremacy lies in its capacity to contain the excess of migration within the parameters of an orderly well-managed adaptation. Here, we might say that the *UK Foresight Report* acts as a kind of racial injunction to manage the unfolding migration before it overwhelms the West.

Racial neoliberalism, biopolitics and white affect

Consider now the consistency between the idea of white affect and David Theo Goldberg's notion of racial neoliberalism. If Goldberg's argument is that racial neoliberalism names the condition of racism without racism, then part of his argument is that racism is sustained under conditions of neoliberalism through a vocabulary that makes no reference to race. I argue

that the discourse on climate change and migration resembles racial neoliberalism inasmuch as it frames climate change in implicitly racial terms through the cultivation of white affect.

Goldberg never uses the term affect in his critical articulations of race, yet his description of race nevertheless has an affective quality. For Goldberg (1993), race is a central organising principle of modernity. Indeed his entire critical philosophy provides an account of modernity as the governing of racial difference. His core argument in *Racist culture* is that while the subject of modernity is abstract and universal (devoid of particularity), 'race undertakes at once to furnish specific identity to otherwise abstract and alienated subjectivities' (1993, p.4). Here, race expresses a kind of white affective intensity, one that arises when the modernist desire for order confronts its excess. Such white affect is further evident in Goldberg's theory of the racial state. For Goldberg, the State provides the central bureaucratic structure for implementing modernist visions, hence its concern with organising the spatial distribution of bodies through, for example, migration and labour market policy, colonialism and the containment of various population groups (i.e. First Nations, asylum seekers). In *The racial state* (2002, 11) he describes these state practices as attempts to resolve the tension between the desire for homogeneity and the perceived threat of heterogeneity. Or in more explicitly racial terms, these state practices share in common a desire to preserve the dominance of white value systems. In this way, white affect is a condition of possibility for Goldberg's racial state.

Racial neoliberalism names a particular historical manifestation of the racial state, one that parallels the replacement of the welfare state with the neoliberal security state. Specifically, racial neoliberalism allows us to conceptualise the emergence of neoliberalism within and in response to a wider spatial and temporal distribution of modern racial anxieties. Although racial neoliberalism articulates differentially from one geographic context to the next, in its broadest sense 'it can be read as a response to this concern about the impending impotence of whiteness' (Goldberg 2009, 337). The case of racial neoliberalism in America provides a superb example. Whereas neoliberalism is often said to entail rollbacks to the welfare state, in America such rollbacks were racially motivated inasmuch as the welfare state was seen to provide employment and educational support to predominantly Black recipients. Thus, for Goldberg, the driving force behind racial neoliberalism is a predominantly 'white' state-phobia which imagines the welfare state as an attempt to ameliorate racial inequality to the detriment of 'ordinary', 'hardworking' (read: white) Americans.

But for Goldberg racial neoliberalism also entails the privatisation of racism. With the State no longer

empowered to reverse racial inequality, race moves from being a prerogative of the State to one of individual preference. Freed from the effects of state intervention, neoliberal subjects are encouraged to allocate their value preferences in the open markets of consumer goods, political ideas and property, albeit providing such preferences make no direct reference to race, which, after all, is largely understood in liberalism to be 'a morally irrelevant category' (Goldberg 1993, 6). Hence, the ironic condition of racial neoliberalism is often said to be post-racial or colour-blind. Race is, thus, rendered invisible in racial neoliberalism, its social pertinence sustained only by proxy. Meanwhile, white supremacy becomes encoded in terms like 'hardworking', 'ordinary', 'normal', while the potential dissolution of white supremacy is encoded in 'a racist imaginary that links white privation and pain with the phantasm of black ascendancy' (Giroux 2010, 6). Here then we can say that race is sustained in the context of racial neoliberalism not simply by its representational proxy, but also by an affective proxy, a general sense of 'the impending impotence of whiteness'. Indeed, it is precisely this sense of white loss, a theme common to many forms of whiteness (Hague *et al.* 2005; Hoelscher 2003; Mann 2008; McCarthy and Hague 2004; Sharma 2006; Winders 2003), that precedes the representation of 'race' in its proxy terms. Such proxy terms provide racists with the means to articulate the fantasy of their impending demise without making direct reference to race. But it is the affective condition of white loss, of the threat of heterogeneity and perceived disorder symbolised by black ascendancy qua the welfare state that allows racial neoliberalism to materialise as both a sociological condition and a form of biopolitical rule. If racial neoliberalism functions by rendering invisible its very terms of account, then the efficacy of racial neoliberalism is partly a function of its non-verbal affective intensity.

Ben Anderson (2012) provides an account of the relationship between affect and biopower that is indispensable for our discussion. When Anderson argues that affect is an 'object-target' of biopower, his claim is that affect is something that can be worked on, developed and deployed as a site over which power is exercised. If, from Foucault, we understand biopower to be a form of power that 'brought life *and its mechanisms* into the realm of explicit calculation' (1978, 143), then what Anderson describes is the way in which biopower attempts to circumscribe, control and manipulate life by modifying life's affective dimensions. Anderson locates the targeting of affect in two distinctive forms of power that together comprise biopower – discipline and biopolitics. The latter of these is more important for our discussion. As Anderson reminds us, Foucault's formulation of biopolitics is principally concerned with normalising life at the level

of the population; doing so promises to regularise population life around a set of norms (i.e. keeping rates of pathology within an acceptable range), while identifying and targeting abnormalities in the population. Moreover, Anderson reminds us that biopolitics is not simply concerned with targeting biological aspects of a population (e.g. sex, nutrition, fitness) but also with affective dimensions of population such as public mood and attributes like 'opinions, ways of doing things, forms of behaviour, customs, fears, prejudices, and requirements' (Foucault 2007, 75 as quoted in Anderson 2012, 32). Thus, for Anderson, biopolitics is concerned with regularising both the biological *and non-biological dimensions* of a population, including affect. And it is here that we connect up Anderson's important insights about affect and biopower with the affective dimensions of racial neoliberalism. For, as Anderson argues, the affective condition of neoliberal rule is one of state-phobia, a fear of excessive state intervention into all aspects of life in which competition is meant to prevail. In this sense, state-phobia is the fear that by intervening in otherwise competitive conditions, the state will undermine the conditions of fair and equal competition. But we should recall that for Foucault (2003; but also for Goldberg 2002), state racism is indispensable to the exercise of biopower. Racism, Foucault tells us, introduces 'a break into the domain of life that is under power's control: the break between what must live and what must die' (2003, 254). Indeed if we accept Foucault's insight that biopower is form a power whose object is life, and that biopolitics is a form of biopower exercised across populations or 'man as a species', and, furthermore, if we accept that biopolitics is to be understood as a power involved in 'making live and letting die' (2003, 247), then we absolutely need to appreciate how biopolitics is foremost a technology of race. For at the very core of biopolitical reasoning is the longevity and survivability *of a population*; its fitness, health and overall life. As such, the biopolitical formulation 'making live and letting die' must be understood as a racial formulation. Anderson, however, hesitates over the question of race in his treatment of affect and biopower, and consequently downplays the far more important point that Foucault makes about biopower, which is that racism is 'a mechanism that allows biopower to work' (2003, 258). The result is that Anderson understates the racial dimension of state-phobia and thus overlooks the proximity between the neoliberal security state and racial neoliberalism, the way in which state-phobia is the affective condition not of neoliberalism, but of *racial neoliberalism*.

The point, however, is not to dismiss Anderson's important observations that affect is both an object-target and condition of possibility for biopower, but to reposition race as central to these relations. Here, then,

with help from Foucault, we can augment Anderson's insights by arguing that if biopower targets affect in the governance of life, then biopower must also be conceived as a relation of race war, a form of power exercised with a view to ensuring the survival of one population over another. Or more specifically, when affect becomes the object-target of biopower, this targeting must be understood to consist of a racial intensity, or white affect, that precedes the consolidation of whiteness as a set of values and the consequent subdivision of the population into 'races', those who must either live or die as a prerogative of population survival. Derek Hook (2005; no pagination) refers to this as 'the strategic conduction of affect' which 'can function as an oblique mode of ontological production' such that "whiteness" comes to feel robust, "substantial" also on the basis of circulations and investments of affect, movements that are not always codifiable'.

White affect, biopolitics and the migration effects of climate change

My argument thus far is that the discourse on climate change and migration orients us to future climate change as a problem of race, an emergent heterogeneity that threatens to disrupt supposedly normal social relations. It achieves this by premediating the future and through the cultivation of white affect. Furthermore, I have argued that white affect mimics racial neoliberalism inasmuch as it cultivates a racial sensibility through an affective proxy that makes no explicit mention of race. In this sense, the discourse entails the 'strategic conduction' of *white* affect, a kind of fealty or sense prior to the explicit articulation of 'white' values.

In this penultimate section, I argue that, as such, the discourse is a form of biopower, a pre-emptive race war in which the survival of one population is pursued at the expense of another. My contention is not, however, that the discourse is a universal or totalising form of biopower. On the contrary, the discourse is highly variegated, it is exercised differentially from one site to the next and its effects are far from universal. Nevertheless, there is a kind of ubiquity to the white affect of climate change and migration discourse in that it prefigures the multiple, even contradictory, expressions of whiteness to which it gives rise. But nor am I suggesting that white affect is cohesive in the sense that it unifies all 'white' people into a singular category of experience. What is important about white affect as the object-target of biopower is the way it constrains the infinite variability of human experience to a limited set of (very different) possibilities. It is an intensity that forecloses the future, confining the future to a narrow horizon of possibilities.

What does this mean in the context of climate change and migration discourse? How does white affect

constitute a race war specific to the migration effects of climate change? My contention is that the affective condition of the discourse on climate change and migration (and indeed climate change) is foremost the anticipation of the coming heterogeneity of climate change and the cessation of an imagined normal. (We should recall here that one of the defining features of climate change and migration discourse is its permanent future-conditionality. The discourse designates a virtual phenomenon that can never be actualised, but only ever sensed.) Again, the images that comprise *Postcards from the future* are exemplary of this anticipatory affect. They contain multiple dystopic futures: London as tropical environment; London as informal settlement; London flooded; and London in deep freeze. Before the consolidation of any specific set of values, any specific intervention, these arresting images hold London in a state of arrest. They equate the human migration effects of climate change with the radical disruption of routine everyday life in London. Passage through central London *en route* to work, for example, will entail navigating a vast informal settlement running from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square. But what these images foreclose is any sense in which the transformations they premeditate might generate multiple better worlds for London's inhabitants. They say little about the extraordinary capacity of people to extend hospitality to those less fortunate, and they remain silent about the emancipatory possibilities that come with living on the threshold of a dramatically altered world. Instead, as an aesthetic of race war they pose the migrant as an abnormality, an exception, the racial Other, to which one must adapt as a condition of survivability. Indeed, these images generate a white affective intensity that confines the imagination to only the possibility of surviving climate change by adapting to an anticipated loss. My contention is that in a world accustomed to thinking race in the absence of race, this intensity circulates as a racial proxy. *Postcards from the future* contains no explicit mention of race, yet through its white intensity climate change is sensed as a racial problem inasmuch as it anticipates the coming heterogeneity, an ungovernable excess and the mixing of bodies. What is foreclosed by such a racial intensity is any sort of affirmative affect, which might usher forth new forms of social, political and cultural life as bodies and worlds collide. In this sense, we could say that white affect pre-conditions population survival by repressing this kind of affirmative, nomadic imagination.

But white affect is generated not simply by an aesthetics of alarm. It also derives from more anodyne statements such as the UK *Foresight Report*. Much can be said about the *Foresight Report*. As mentioned earlier, its principal significance lies in the way in which it rearticulates migration in the context of global

environmental change as a problem of development and human security as opposed to one of national and military security. It also dispenses with determinist reasoning and instead broadly characterises climate change and migration as a complex, non-linear relation (Baldwin 2014; Piguet 2013). And importantly, it offers a set of normative values, posing migration as a legitimate adaptive response to climate change rather than as a failure to adapt, and positing adaptive migration as a mechanism for cultivating resilience among otherwise vulnerable populations. In many ways then the *UK Foresight Report*, unlike *Postcards from the future*, offers a more optimistic account of migration and climate change. Rather than an explicitly dystopic future, it allows for migrant agency that is otherwise disavowed in tropes of security and victimhood. Could it not be argued that the *Foresight Report* therefore generates the kind of affirmative affect that we found missing from *Postcards*? It is, after all, a more sympathetic account of migration. Indeed, the migration-as-adaptation thesis espoused in the *Foresight Report* is laudable inasmuch as it might normalise migration and serve as a reminder that humans have always been a partly nomadic species (Cohen 2015; Colebrook 2015).

But where the *Foresight Report* gives an optimistic gloss to the migration effects of climate change, ultimately it circulates a similar white affect by posing adaptive migration as an object of expert management without which dystopic, heterogeneous futures may prevail. For example, the executive summary tells us that ‘there are potentially grave implications of future environmental change for migration, for individuals and policy makers alike, requiring a strategic approach to policy’ (2011, 9). And further on it informs us that ‘planned and well-managed migration (which poses operational challenges) can reduce the chance of later humanitarian emergencies and displacement’. Similar statements are found throughout the text, suggesting that for all its progressive promise, it is founded on a sense in which migration risks becoming an overwhelming force in the future, if measures are not taken now that would properly maximise migration for wider social, political and economic benefits. Numerous commentators have rightly seized on these statements to reveal the report’s biopolitical underpinnings and to show how its ‘strategic approach’ points towards a new governmentality, one that would regularise migration flows to ensure that capital accumulation thrives under conditions of climate change (Bettini 2014; Felli and Castree 2012; Methmann and Oels 2015; Oels 2014). But for our purposes, the *Foresight Report* is important because it functions as a kind of security apparatus; it installs an affective infrastructure through which climate change comes to be conceived as a problem of racial management, albeit in a way that obscures any obvious racial connotations. The text advances the

desirability of adaptive migration, the benefits of which ought to be ‘maximised’. But it also stipulates that maladaptive migration (migration into areas of high environmental, social and political risk, such as urban informal settlers; and so-called trapped or immobile populations) requires new forms of intervention. Maximising adaptive migration in the interest of capital circulation and planetary well-being, while containing maladaptive migration bears striking resemblance to Foucault’s biopolitical formulation ‘making live and letting die’. And as we saw earlier, this is an unmistakably racial formation – a ‘break into the domain of life that is under power’s control’. Human planetary survival, including capital circulation, must be actively made to flourish through, for example, adaptive migration, while also requiring intensive interventions into the lives of those deemed unfit for or incapable of survival (maladaptive migrants). What is being mobilised at this biopolitical–affective interface, however, is not whiteness, nor white supremacy, nor white subjectivity (although one could conceivably read the *Foresight Report* for its tacit whiteness). Rather, what this emblematic text sets in train is a white affective infrastructure that seeks to ensure ‘that whatever form the future takes it will emerge only within the possible futures enabled by premediated networks of technical, social and cultural actors’ (Grusin 2010, 50), in this case a future migration crisis amplified by global environmental change. The only thing standing between the supposed normalcy of the present and a future of ungovernable excess is the expert migration manager. And herein lays the politics of white affect: what the *Foresight Report* offers is an attenuated future – expert intervention or an interminable crisis of unmanaged migration. But why, as seems to be implied by the *Foresight Report*, must the future be so constrained? Can a future of human mobility not also be affirmed as the productive ‘ground’ from which to reimagine new forms of political subjectivity, or new forms of political solidarity (Wainwright and Mann 2015, 315)? Is it not also an opportunity to pose new questions about what it means to be ‘human’ or how to live in the world? It is to these questions that I turn now in the conclusion.

Conclusion

In a recent, important sequel to ‘Climate leviathan’, Joel Wainwright and Geoff Mann (2015, 315) argue for a reinvigorated concept of the political adequate to the political economies of climate change adaptation. Such a concept should not be confused with ‘a particular condition or set of institutions’, but should instead be conceived as ‘the grounds on which the relationship between dominant and dominated takes form’. In the main, they argue that this ground is the historical form of liberal capitalism and insist that any attempt to

displace liberal capitalism, a model of social organisation that has proven itself woefully incapable of reversing carbon emissions, must come to grips analytically with the transformation of the political itself. For the political must adapt as a pre-condition for the adaption of capital, which, I would argue, is the true ambition of all mainstream adaptation programmes (i.e. the Cancun Adaptation Framework). ‘To grasp the adaptation of the political’, Wainwright and Mann argue, entails reading ‘as *conjunctural* our strange present-conditional politics, in which what might happen in the future seems to determine the present’ (2015, 319; their emphasis). And their conclusion is that the political is adapting through the ‘furtive way the future bends back onto the now’, a ‘politics of emergency’ premised on fear and the deferral of politics (2015, 319). In other words, what Wainwright and Mann seem to be pointing us towards is an analysis that locates affect as a core relation between dominant and dominated. My contention is that any such analysis must come to terms with *white* affect. For if climate change is ultimately a politics of survival, and if the political of climate change ultimately comes down to deciding the criteria for survivability, then white affect clarifies that the politics of domination specific to climate change are racial through and through. White affect is an orientation that reduces climate change to the technocratic question of where and under what conditions people can move as a pre-condition for human survival. Attending to the way white affect organises the science and policy of climate change impacts and adaptation would reveal much about who makes this science, for whom and with what kinds of effects. And it would reveal much about how power itself is adapting to climate change.

If the discourse on climate change and migration carries racial connotations, then the politics of climate justice really must come to terms with race and racism beyond simply recognising that climate change will be disproportionately experienced by people of colour, the majority world. This may prove very true, of course. But such a view narrowly conceives of race as something that can be read off skin, or ethnicity, or even the world map, as opposed to say an epistemological orientation, a framework of meaning, a habit of perception or a social process. It risks orienting us to the phenomenon of climate change through the lens of white saviourism, when what is required is much closer attention to the way in which race is being rescripted at this transitional moment in our ‘natural history’ (Wainwright and Mann 2015). ‘Race’ is, after all, a prominent, if nowadays mostly invisible, term of reference in the construction of geographical knowledge (Kobayashi 2003).

But perhaps the relation between climate change and migration might be conceived otherwise. Rather than an anticipatory affect of loss in the face of

ungovernability, perhaps this virtual relation might be re-appropriated as the ‘ground’ on which more progressive political imaginaries might begin to take shape. Claire Colebrook (2015) has argued that rather than conceiving of human mobility in exceptional terms, we might instead pose human mobility as a normal condition of life. Such a reversal would then recast the state apparatus – a technology of emplacement, containment and sedentariness, as in colonialism, segregation and forced (im)mobility – in exceptional terms. And here we might begin to imagine new political solidarities taking shape between, say, Native Americans in Alaska, whose efforts to resettle in response to coastal erosion are also a direct consequence of their colonisation, Central American migrants whose mobility is the result of NAFTA and land rights, the semi-skilled Newfoundlander whose seasonal migration to northern Alberta is driven by the exigencies of oil capital and by the absence of employment in Newfoundland, or the rural-to-urban migrant in Dhaka or Bangkok. Perhaps our collective, potential mobility with the advent of climate change might allow for new affordances in politics and ethics.

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Notes

- 1 <http://www.postcardsfromthefuture.co.uk/> Accessed 7 August 2015.
- 2 For the purposes of this paper, I use the term climate migrant to refer to a person who may relocate either permanently or temporarily as a result of climate change. For the sake of my argument, I also conflate climate migrant and climate refugee, while recognising the importance of distinguishing these two terms for purposes of law. My reason for this is that the affective dimension of the discourse on climate change and migration that I attend to in the paper is common across the language of climate refugees and, for that matter, that of environmental migrants and environmental refugees.
- 3 For an excellent critique of the UK Foresight Report on Migration and Global Environmental Change, see Felli and Castree (2012).
- 4 In slightly different terms, Derek Hook describes this as a “tactics of castration” that is not castration anxiety itself,

but perhaps rather a set of political sentiments arranged in a structure or pattern of affect' (2007, 270).

- 5 This latter narrative appears in a report published by the Center for American Progress called *Climate change, migration and conflict in Northwest Africa: rising dangers and policy options across the arc of tension* (see Werz and Conley 2012).

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