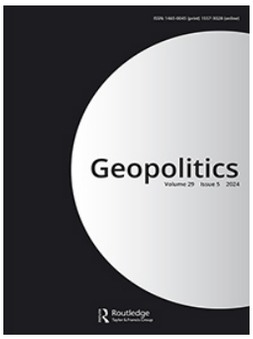

Geopolitics

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/fgeo20

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Deirdre Conlon

To cite this article: Deirdre Conlon (11 Oct 2024): The Spectacle of Invisibility: Vanishing Points and the Spatialised Legal Violence of the UK's Expanding Quasi-Carceral Geography of Immigration Control, Geopolitics, DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2024.2411328

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2024.2411328

Published online: 11 Oct 2024.

GEOPOLITICS
https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2024.2411328

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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The Spectacle of Invisibility: Vanishing Points and the Spatialised Legal Violence of the UK's Expanding Quasi-Carceral Geography of Immigration Control

Deirdre Conlon

School of Geography, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

ABSTRACT

Increasingly, irregularized migrants are pushed to rely on more and more clandestine means in attempts to reach so-called safe havens in Europe and elsewhere. Often, these actions are necessitated by governments instituting ever-more hostile and violent mechanisms of immigration control. Taking as its focus key developments in the UK's morphing and expanding 'quasi-carceral geography' of immigration control, this paper considers some of these developments alongside Derek Gregory's incisive essay titled analysis of 'vanishing points'. The paper examines how the spectacular and invisible are instrumentalized simultaneously to produce spatialised legal vanishing points in the UK and beyond by scrutinising three distinct yet interconnected sites where vanishing points materialise, each successively more proximate to UK geographical terrain. Specifically, I examine the multi-scalar legal contestations that surrounded the UK-Rwanda Agreement; the invisibility and tactical ambiguities of juxtaposed border controls in Northern France; and the downgrading of rights, responsibilities, and accountability in amended rules for the accommodation of irregular migrant arrivals, focusing on the former military barracks of Manston, Kent, UK. Drawing on Gregory's analysis as a framework, the paper traces the significance not only of law's presence or suspension but also its application, morphing, and contestation within these sites – and more generally – for the emergence and functioning of a continuum of extra-territorial, ambiguous, discretionary, violent spaces where possibilities for sanctuary, safe haven, or security are continually deferred or denied amidst the spectacular invisibility and persistent spatialised legal vanishing points.

Introduction

UK governments have arguably always been inhospitable to migrants (Mayblin 2017; Winders 2013). In the past decade, this stance has taken an increasingly pernicious turn, one initiated, in 2012, by a 'secret inter-ministerial government group, initially called the Hostile Environment

CONTACT Deirdre Conlon d.conlon@leeds.ac.uk School of Geography, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, UK

Working Group' (Yeo 2020, 29). The group's work informed 'hostile environment policies' enacted by then Home Secretary, Theresa May, and legislated in 2014 and 2016 Immigration Acts. More recently, the Nationality and Borders Act, which became law in April 2022, and the Illegal Migration Act (IMA), passed in 2023, enacted another rash of draconian immigration enforcement measures. The 2022 Act set out 'differential treatment' for asylum seekers and refugees based on means of arrival to the UK. The Illegal Migration Act made it the Home Secretary's legal duty to detain and remove unauthorised migrants by either deporting them to their place of origin or expelling them to a third country, thus ending prospects of asylum in the UK for spontaneous migrant arrivals.[1]

There is little doubt that under the Conservative Party, the UK government's approach to migrants and immigration enforcement was sceptical – and, in fact, dismissive – of principles and rights to asylum and safe haven, as expressed in international agreements such as the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951). Developments like these have led scholars to conclude that we are witnessing the 'death of asylum' (Mountz 2020). The emerging landscape of migration control is unfolding in a spectacular fashion that coincides with a rhetoric and politically expedient use of 'crisis' (Mountz and Hiemstra 2014). In the UK, the so-called 'small boat crossings' crisis, which refers to migrant arrivals by boat across the English Channel between Northern France and England's south coast, has rapidly gained visual and discursive dominance in media and political debate. Increased numbers of migrant arrivals produced a spectacular government response too, including the UK-Rwanda deal to offshore asylum. Grounded in the geography of externalisation, the UK-Rwanda plan was fervently pursued by the Conservative government (Right to Remain 2024). While the plan has been quashed by the UK's recently elected Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, who noted he is 'not prepared to continue with gimmicks that don't act as a deterrent' (Francis 2024), the Labour Party's pre-election manifesto pledged to address the UK's migration issues, and the Labour government has launched a 'UK Border Security Command' intended to tackle small boat crossings (Whannel 2024). Alongside these developments there are a number of less readily detected yet significant dimensions of the UK's expanding quasi-carceral geography that warrant critical attention. These include extra-territorial spaces of British sovereignty in France where migrants are held up temporarily in short-term holding facilities that are hidden from public scrutiny and drenched with ambiguity. And, within the geographical terrain of the UK, changes to the categories of and rules for accommodating 'irregular' migrants are cast as mundane bureaucratic matters yet they have come into effect in spectacular fashion and have substantial impacts on migrants' access to rights and welfare.

The emerging legal, political, spatialised landscape – wherein the UK as a notional 'safe haven' is being dismantled – is choreographed through 'regimes of visibility' (Tazzioli and Walters 2016, 445) where selective visibility as well as the invisibility of migration produce 'a contested and strategic field' (Tazzioli and Walters 2016, 447). Following Walters, I refer to the UK's newly developing infrastructure of migration control as a 'quasi-carceral geography' (2020, 3) comprised by a growing array of spaces, sites, and 'heterogeneous elements' (Walters 2020, 3) that contain, confine, selectively show and hide, and ultimately exclude migrants from accessing safety. I draw on Derek Gregory's (2007) 'vanishing points' framework – which calls for attention to the space and place of law, in particular to its application, materialisation, and contestation – to examine the simultaneity of spectacle and invisibility in immigration control. I argue that UK immigration's quasi-carceral geography is morphing and expanding with a series of vanishing points that render the possibility of seeking sanctuary, asylum, or reaching a safe haven continually deferred or denied amidst a state of perpetual legal violence.

Methodologically, the paper draws on desk-based research underpinned by feminist political geography approaches to data collection and analysis. In particular, I draw on Hiemstra's (2017) discussion of 'periscoping', which details an approach to data where various elements are difficult to access, or, sometimes, purposefully hidden from view. Hiemstra usefully explains that a periscope can be understood in research both as a metaphor and a tool through which researchers can piece together a coherent analysis and account of different and – at times – disparate facets of an issue, often where elements are obscured or not directly observable. This approach is apt for this paper's attention to facets of UK immigration control that are materially hidden from view or that take place within the realm of legal decision-making, for instance. Data collection and analysis involved collation and review of several different information sources including legal documents, policies, and rules related to the sites of interest; specialist and general media reports on legal cases relevant to developments such as the UK-Rwanda Agreement and redesignation of the Manston facility; review of publicly available inspection reports conducted by Her/His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) for short-term holding facilities in Northern France and the South of England; and media coverage of each of the sites and developments discussed in the paper. Following Hiemstra's (2017, 330) approach, sources of information were assembled, reflected on, and refracted with other data sources 'to construct a coherent, if always incomplete' account of the legal landscape and expanding geography of immigration control vanishing points put into place by the UK government.

The paper proceeds as follows: I first provide a focused review to contextualise vanishing points as a framework and situate it 'vis-à-vis'attention to visibility and invisibility in migration studies and legal geographies of migration and asylum in particular. Following this, the empirical section

details three sites where vanishing points take form as part of the UK's quasi-carceral geography of immigration control: the now abandoned UK-Rwanda Agreement, juxtaposed border controls between the UK and France, and the repurposed army barracks and reclassified short-term holding facility for irregular migrant arrivals at Manston, Kent in the UK. Each site articulates distinct legal and spatial characteristics that align with vanishing points, and, together, advance a critical account and insights on recent expressions of the UK's long-established position of hostility towards migrants. The concluding section considers some of the wider implications of this analysis of policies and practices that hide, elide, obfuscate, and ultimately exclude large swaths of migrants by identifying the UK's morphing migration control landscape of spatialised legal violence as an ever-prescient harbinger of Europe's notional liberalism as a safe haven.

Situating Vanishing Points as a Conceptual and Analytical Framework in Critical Legal Geographies of Migration

There is an established literature addressing the UK's long history of immigration as well as its long-standing antagonism to migrants and racialised groups. This includes research documenting and analysing immigration policy developments over the last decade. Scholars highlight, for instance, the cruelty and violence of 'street level bureaucracy' in immigration enforcement and governance (Bhatia 2020; Gill 2016), the violent effects of hostility for vulnerable migrants (Darling 2022; Stevens and Ciftci 2022; Waite 2017) as well as knock-on impacts for migrant support organisations (Conlon and Gill 2015). Research from and beyond the UK highlights some of the enduring impacts of colonial logics (Bhambra 2017; deNoronha 2019) and the implications of migration 'crises' vis-à-vis international commitments such as the U.N. Convention on Human Rights (Asoni 2023), as well as in understanding the racialised conceits of liberal democracy (Isakjee et al. 2020). Recent scholarship focuses on newly emerging developments in UK migration policy and governance. Esposito and Tazzioli (2023), for instance, highlight how former military barracks were repurposed during the COVID-19 pandemic producing a 'confinement continuum' (2023, 8) where biopolitical technology and misinformation by state authorities become effective governmental tools. Davies et al. (2021) focus attention on the escalation of hostile policies and legislation in response to migrant arrivals to the UK via boat across the English Channel.

In this paper, I build on these rich veins of critical inquiry, augmenting them with a focus on vanishing points as a framework that affords renewed and timely critical insights on the significance of law and spatialised legal violence to analyse current and evolving responses to irregular migration in the UK, Europe, and more widely. Before reviewing key facets of the vanishing points framework, the paper briefly outlines scholarship examining migration,

visibility and invisibility, and legal geographies of asylum and migration in order to better situate vanishing points as it relates to these important dimensions of critical migration scholarship.

Visibility and Invisibility

Migration scholars have engaged in vibrant discussion on the significance of spectacle as well as invisibility in the politics of migration. Spectacular representations of migrants and migration help to fuel migration as 'crisis' rhetoric (Mountz and Hiemstra 2014), which, in turn, beget an array of responses such as racialised fear, moral panic, and racist violence (see Huysmans 2006; Tyler 2013). This context serves to legitimise 'muscular' government responses that render migrants visible according to specific tropes and simultaneously pronounce governments' spectacular efforts to securitise, push back, and deter migrant arrivals. Research from many different sites affirms the tenacity of these tropes and the persistent value of differentiated spectacles of visibility in the politics of migration enforcement (see Andersson 2014; DeGenova 2013; Hiemstra 2019; Mainwaring and Silverman 2017; Mountz and Loyd 2014; Walters 2020, 2021).

Scholars also highlight how the spectacular serves to cloak the politics and economics of migration, and, in particular, the violence of migration management and enforcement practices. In their work on detention, for instance, Mainwaring and Silverman note that a corollary of migration as spectacle is 'a hidden backstage [that] is also the site of allocating benefits accruing from financial opportunities or political influence' (2017, 10). In another vein, research from the U.S (Coutin 2003), examining migration in the Mediterranean (Squire 2022), and in Nordic states (Kallio and Häkli 2023; Tedeschi 2022), to name just a few sites, increasingly attends to both strategic and tactical spaces of invisibility and inconspicuousness for migrants for purposes of survival and as resistance in response to the ever-increasing hostility that they face globally.

Tazzioli and Walters (2016) usefully distill scholarship on visibility and invisibility in critical migration scholarship describing a 'regime of visibility formed of thresholds of visibility and invisibility' (p. 475). In other words, critical analyses of migration are constituted through an array of formations of visibility where 'the see-able and unsee-able is shaped by complex relations' (2016, 450). This paper draws from this incisive formulation and the growing scholarship that attends to the diverse, complex ways that spectacle, visibility, and invisibility manifest. I call attention to the ways visibility and invisibility are manipulated in the legal spaces and geographies of migration control. There, they serve to expand the reach of law and policies and muddy and obscure their practice in ways that yield perpetual violence in the form of uncertainty, discretion, ambiguity, and contestation. Before turning to

vanishing points as a framework for analysis, I provide a brief overview of legal geography and critical migration scholarship, highlighting, in particular, conceptual overlaps with scholarship on visibility and invisibility, in order to situate vanishing points.

Legal Geography and Critical Migration Scholarship

The law, its spaces and spatialities are established foci among geographers (Bloch 2024; Blomley 1994; Braverman et al. 2014), and interest in law and geography, their 'constitutivities, complexities, and contingencies' (Delaney 2015, 96) has now generated a substantial 'corpus of legal geography' (Delaney 2015, 97). Recent scholarship emphasises ever more intricate cross-disciplinary and analytical imbrications. For instance, Brickell and Cuomo make a case for feminist geolegality, which draws on and integrates epistemological and ontological orientations of feminist geography to conceptualise and analyse the multi-scalar, intersectional dimensions of the social in order to elucidate 'the "indissolvable relations" between law, space, and the workings of power across intimate and global scales' (Brickell and Cuomo 2019, 105).

The complex arrangements of law, space, and power have drawn attention among critical migration scholars too. Work in this area highlights the spatialities and temporalities of law (Martin 2011; Mountz 2013a) as well as its malleability and discretionary character. Cynthia Gorman, for example, uses 'feminist legal archeology', a methodology that scrutinises the 'micro-geographies of legal reasoning as they relate to race, class, gender, and nation' (Gorman 2019, 1054) with a focus on the intersection between domestic violence and U.S. asylum law, as well as in immigration enforcement operations (see Gorman and Wilson 2021). Also, attending to asylum and to the space of the court specifically, Gill et al. (2018) examine how judicial discretion can inflect asylum adjudication hearings in the UK. It is, thus, fair to say, that critical geographers and migration scholars who are attuned to politics and law continue to elaborate nuanced positions that emphasise intersections between law and space as 'a dynamic, shifting, often contradictory, multi-point process' (Delaney 2015, 97).

Working in a different context, that of war crimes courts, Jeffrey (2020) describes these spaces and law more generally as depending on 'edges'. Examining 'the edge of law' means understanding law and legal geographies as 'a moving frontier [. . .] of creation, enactment, and destruction' (Jeffrey 2020, 178). This position complements the vanishing points framework because, as detailed in the next section, vanishing points describes the space and spatiality of law as dynamic, contested, and strategic in character. Further, Gill et al. (2020) draw attention to law's materialities and, with this, the significance of absence, both in empirical spaces and events such as asylum hearings and as a conceptual omission in legal geography. Noting that

presence and absence are co-constituted, they observe that 'attending to both the law's presence and absence is necessary to capture [. . .] complex legal spatialities' (Gill et al. 2020, 940). Focusing on vanishing points, a conception that relates to yet is distinct from absence, I take up the call from Gill et al. (2020) to attend to absence and related phenomena. A focus on vanishing points offers a distinctive and apposite framework that augments attention to absence. Importantly, vanishing points are attuned to the significance of the visual, to spectacle and invisibility, in the politics of migration. In Gregory's framework and the analysis here, vanishing points are understood as a central feature in the dynamics of law and space. Vanishing points are significant to law's instrumentalization, which is to say its presence, occlusion, and disappearance, and they are an increasingly important constitutive feature of the legal landscape and infrastructure of migrant containment and control. I now turn to a brief overview of the vanishing points framework as originally articulated by Gregory and as it has been taken up in the context of migration.

Vanishing Points

Derek Gregory (2007) usefully conceptualises vanishing points from a geographical perspective with an incisive analysis that examines the spatial, political, and legal underpinnings of the spectacle of violent abuses that took place in Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and in the Guantánamo Bay prison camp in Cuba in connection with the U.S. post 9/11 'war on terror'. Gregory draws on Agamben, Foucault, and Schmitt to elaborate vanishing points as a 'dispersed series of sites where sovereign and bio-power coincide' (2007, 206) and that, in the context of the 'war on terror', have taken shape 'around the soft edges of international law' (Mountz 2013b, 31). Following Foucault, Gregory argues that contemporary war – and as I contend here, the war on migrants and migration – is 'fought through the law [or] "law as tactic", as Foucault might say' (Gregory 2007, 207). Vanishing points are revealed not so much as a dismissal of laws but as 'site[s] of political struggle not only in their suspension but also in their formulation, interpretation, and application' (Gregory 2007, 207). Here, the 'edges of law' as Jeffrey (2020) proposes, as well as what is visible or spectacular, and what is not seen – whether hidden, invisible, or made to disappear – render vanishing points.

Gregory's incisive essay details several 'features' of vanishing points; these include a reliance on and necessity of multiple actors, actions, and spaces as well as their strategic visibility and circulation. The essay scrutinises the spectacular images of torture meted out to Iraqi prisoners by U.S. military personnel at the Abu Ghraib prison in 2003. Gregory also examines media depictions of prisoners taken by the U.S. during the war on terror in Afghanistan and incarcerated at the Guantánamo prison camp beginning in 2002 and where, currently 30 individuals remain detained at

the camp (Pfeiffer et al. 2024). He notes that the notorious images of abuse and dehumanisation that circulated from these sites were deployed in order to intimidate. Gregory unpicks the images and practices that unfolded in these spaces and, by doing so, highlights their strategic circulation. He demonstrates how these spaces along with the egregious acts therein are legible as sensationalised cultural phenomena that reproduce and replay colonial legacies and fantasies where racialised bodies are violently subjugated. I draw on Gregory's delineation of vanishing points to interrogate some of the ways that immigration controls in the UK have been taking shape recently. Focusing on sites that constitute the UK's immigration control regime, I examine the strategic use of distance – in the UK-Rwanda deal – as a spectacle that helped make invisible other changes taking place within and closer to the UK. I examine the increasing proliferation of sites and spaces, actors and practices that are in use to contain and control irregular migrants and asylum seekers in the UK. I explore some of the ways the proliferation of sites as well as legal debates and contestations in and about these spaces manifest vanishing points.

In her work, Mountz (2013b, 2020) calls attention to vanishing points with an explicit focus on forced migration and asylum. Where Gregory emphasises geo-legal dimensions of vanishing points in the war on terror, Mountz highlights how 'nation states use geography strategically to inhibit and erode access to the right to seek asylum' (2013b, 29). Mountz draws from Judith Butler (2004), who, like Gregory, has interrogated Abu Ghraib prison and Guantánamo prison camp in connection with the U.S. war on terror with a focus on practices where certain lives are devalued, dehumanised, and invisibilized, and where 'the politics of erasure [. . .] unfold' (Mountz 2013b, 33). Mountz focuses on externalisation specifically, to delineate a series of 'geographical moves' that become vanishing points, which shrink the spaces of safety for asylum seekers. She delineates practices including: externalisation of border enforcement; externalisation of asylum processing; use of remote detention; use of islands to process and detain; and separation of families. Each of these moves 'traffics in the power of distance to erase people – their lives, struggles, precarity, and deaths – from public memory. This erasure takes the form of invisibility, homogenisation, and racialization in the public sphere' (2013b, 34).

Several facets of Mountz's (2013b) analysis are salient. First, that the geographical distance that externalisation affords has social and political effects. Distancing mobilises a politics of fear among national publics, which produces asylum seekers as a security threat. This rationalises their exclusion and expulsion and feeds into their dehumanisation and invisibilization. In turn, and following Butler (2004), these processes bring about different forms of death: physical death, erasure of political voice and representation, and dehumanisation or ontological death, characterised by prolonged limbo,

isolation, and uncertainty. I explore some of the ways these manifestations of vanishing points are produced in the UK.

Also, significant is Mountz's observation that externalisation policies embolden governments to act in politically 'rogue' ways, carrying out 'strategic and politicized agendas offshore – beyond the limits of sovereign territory – that would seemingly undermine and break international and domestic law if carried out on mainland territory' (Mountz 2013b, 32). Mountz notes that such agendas usher similar practices in other contexts. Further, Mountz notes the exclusionary and invisibilizing moves afforded by externalisation 'can be shown to be actively at work internally to sovereign territory as well' (2013b, 45). Such moves include the interiorisation of borders and strategic siting of detention centres with impacts for asylum adjudication, for instance, with documented evidence of the geography of detention producing differential outcomes for irregularized migrants. I examine how externalisation's affordances – the production of perpetual uncertainties, dehumanisation, and ontological violence for migrants, and use and contestations of law as a tactic in the war on migrants – now occur in closer proximity to and even within the UK's territorial space.

Overall, this paper brings together scholarship on visibility and invisibility, legal geographies of migration and asylum, as well as Gregory's and Mountz's insights on vanishing points as an incisive framework, in order to examine the UK's shifting and expanding quasi-carceral continuum. I argue that recent and ongoing shifts taking place in the UK's migration control regime are illustrative of vanishing points in the war on migration. These are characterised by productive sites of political struggle – all the way through – where an array of agents and spaces are enmeshed and produce ambiguities in law, practices, accountability, and political and legal possibilities, which bear down on asylum seekers who are violently vanished but not erased, while the prospect of the UK as a safe haven becomes ever more elusive.

The UK-Rwanda Asylum Agreement: A Spectacular Batting Game and a Calculated Vanishing Point

The UK-Rwanda Agreement was first announced on 14 April 2022. With the plan, the UK Conservative government intended to off-shore UK asylum claims to Rwanda effectively ending the prospect of the UK as a safe haven for irregular migrants. Announcing the agreement, then Prime Minister, Boris Johnson proclaimed: 'The deal we have done is uncapped and Rwanda will have the capacity to resettle tens of thousands of people in the years ahead. And let's be clear, Rwanda is one of the safest countries in the world, globally recognised for its record on welcoming and integrating migrants. [. . .] We are confident that our new Migration Partnership is fully compliant with our international legal obligations' (Johnson 2022, np). The initial agreement,

which was distinct from migration laws including the 2022 UK Borders Act and the 2023 Illegal Migration Act, sat alongside these pieces of legislation providing a political and economic deal that was to bolster and stretch the UK's hostile environment. Initially instituted as a memorandum of understanding (MoU), the Agreement subsequently morphed into two legal documents: the UK-Rwanda treaty and the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act.

From inception, and through its various iterations, the UK-Rwanda deal was the subject of criticism and legal action, and, despite costing millions of pounds, no deportations to Rwanda have occurred. Arguably, the plan will be remembered primarily as a spectacular policy failure; yet, additionally, the UK-Rwanda Agreement is significant for how it illuminates a relation between the spectacle of externalisation and the legal landscape of vanishing points in the current moment. This section first examines the initial agreement, which, as a MoU, was not subject to oversight and would not have had any force of, or recourse to, legal mechanisms in relation to adherence or accountability. Following this, I detail the multi-scalar legal appeals that beset the Agreement from the moment it was introduced. While the UK-Rwanda Agreement is now 'dead and buried' (Chibelushi and Cyuzuzo 2024) and this particular iteration of the UK's hostile environment for migrants stymied, the wrangling and tussle surrounding this Agreement remain significant in shedding light on how the deal and its contestation produce vanishing points in the UK's expanding migrant quasi-carceral geography.

As a memorandum of understanding (MoU), the UK-Rwanda deal was a non-binding voluntary agreement between two parties with shared interests in said agreement. Among the terms of the initial deal were that Rwanda would receive £140 million (approx. $176 million) in development funding.[2] In addition, costs for processing asylum claims as well as subsequent integration costs for any individuals granted asylum, estimated at £12,000 (or $15,000) per person, would be covered by the UK. In exchange, the UK government would relocate to Rwanda those migrants arriving to the UK from January 2022 onwards deemed to have entered the country 'illegally'. The partnership was to last for five years initially with a possibility of renewal by mutual agreement. A MoU is a moral and political agreement and not a binding legal contract. The use of MoUs is common (Aust 2013). Because they are non-binding, there are no requirements related to parliamentary review or public debate. Nonetheless, a committee of the UK's House of Lords – charged with scrutinising the elected government, its policies, and legislation, among other tasks – noted, that the UK-Rwanda Agreement was 'a matter of considerable public interest from the start and should have been brought to Parliament by the Government more formally' (House of Lords International Agreements Committee 2022, 4). But it wasn't; instead, the deal was set up and implemented in stealth-like manner as a mundane business

transaction with which the UK government could better realise its draconian vision for immigration and 'effectively opt [. . .] out of the global asylum system' (Walsh 2023, np). In addition, the Treaty that replaced the MoU in December 2023 as part of the UK government's response to legal challenges (and discussed below), was an instrument that gave the sitting government prerogative power meaning while members of Parliament could scrutinise the Agreement their ability to limit or prevent its implementation was very limited (Jones 2023).

Guided in part by the outcry from national and international advocacy groups as well as from members of the general public, the House of Lords International Agreements Committee began an inquiry, in June 2022, to consider 'the choice of an MoU [*sic*] as a vehicle for implementing the [UK-Rwanda] arrangement' (House of Lords International Agreements Committee 2022, 2). In other words, the focus of their inquiry was the MoU as an instrument and not the substance of the UK-Rwanda deal. The inquiry's focus is significant because it highlights that vanishing points are produced around 'the soft edges of [. . .] law' (Mountz 2013b, 31). Further, as Gregory observes, vanishing points must be understood in relation to how laws and regulations are interpreted, contested, and applied. The House of Lords report was published in October 2022. The report draws on evidence submitted by 19 organisations and individuals, including UNHCR, Bail for Immigration Detainees, the Public Law Project, Medical Justice, as well as lawyers, academics, and medical professionals. A number of submissions draw attention to individual asylum seekers who were served with 'notices of removal' immediately after the Agreement came into effect, many of whom were identified as 'highly vulnerable' and experiencing PTSD, depression, and suicidal thoughts (see House of Lords International Agreements Committee report 2022, 13). Several were also noted to have family members in the UK, including some families who had previously been granted refugee status.

A number of dimensions of the UK-Rwanda Agreement are significant within the framework of vanishing points. Gregory notes that the vanishing points of law and legal spaces are not merely a question of presence or suspension but also how laws are formalised, interpreted, and applied. By initially adopting a MoU, the UK government effectively bypassed the law. And, even with the treaty and legislation that was subsequently developed, the UK government sought to 'disapply' some sections of the Human Rights Act in the context of a UK-Rwanda deal. With this, laws were not merely suspended; they were also made more flexible and discretionary in a deliberate, tactical move.

Using specific legal instruments and manoeuvring them in particular ways communicates to individual asylum seekers, parliamentary officials, advocates, and the public that whatever legal mechanisms may exist, they simply are not available. In this sense, while laws do exist, and under other

circumstances they could be applied or appealed to, in this situation the possibility and force of law vanishes. At the same time, it is also important to recognise that the legal sphere continued to matter as was demonstrated in the Conservative government's subsequent move to fashion a legal framework with the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act. Enacted as law in April 2024 (Walsh 2024) despite widespread objection, this legislation requires judges and officials to treat Rwanda as a 'safe' country for deportation purposes; it also occludes recourse to specific laws for individual migrants. In other words, what has transpired in the UK recently is not a straightforward disappearance of law but rather a complicated and convoluted vanishing point. Turning attention to the legal disputes that ensued with efforts to bring the UK-Rwanda Agreement into effect sheds further light on the machinations and convolutions of the law's vanishing points and their tactical place in the UK's morphing migrant quasi-carceral geography.

Efforts to put the Agreement into practice immediately ran into problems. The first deportation flight under the deal was planned to expel 130 individuals. However, due to legal appeals, some in connection with article 8 of the UK's Human Rights Act as well as pending torture and trafficking cases, this number dropped to seven individuals who were to be sent to Rwanda on a flight that would cost the UK government approximately £500,000 (equivalent to approximately $631,000)[3] (Bland 2022). This first deportation flight, scheduled for 15 June 2022, was halted at the last minute, thanks to a series of legal challenges. The first challenge against the deportation order was upheld by UK courts but subsequently taken to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) (also in June '22), where an injunction on implementation was issued pending review by UK courts. In other words, the European Court batted the issue back to the UK. On 19 December 2022, the UK's High Court announced the outcome of its review ruling that the Rwanda agreement was lawful. However, it also granted that asylum seekers could appeal their deportation orders on an individual basis. These appeals were heard by the Court of Appeals in April 2023 and, in June 2023, the Court of Appeals granted the individual appeals on the specific grounds that Rwanda is not a safe third country. The Appeals Court thus also reversed the UK High Court's earlier, December 2022, decision stating that 'unless and until deficiencies in its asylum processes are corrected, removal of asylum seekers to Rwanda will be unlawful' (Tan 2023, np). The government subsequently appealed this ruling via the Supreme Court, and, in November 2023 that court ruled that the UK-Rwanda Agreement was, indeed, unlawful. In response, in December 2023, the UK government replaced the original MoU with an international treaty, which was legally binding for both parties, and introduced the aforementioned Safety of Rwanda Bill – now Act – as emergency legislation. A former Supreme Court judge, Lord Sumption, described the latter development as 'constitutionally

really extraordinary [. . .] effectively overrul[ing] a decision on the facts, on the evidence by the highest court in the land' (Rajan and Robinson 2023, np).

The UK-Rwanda Agreement created a spectacle that is a vanishing point. It's clear that the deals aim was to ensure that asylum seekers disappear, which, in theory, would help to address the UK's so-called migrant crisis, even if it would only do so marginally (Walsh 2024). In this way, the Conservative government could appear to be responding valiantly, even spectacularly, to the migrant 'problem'. The plan intending to off-load asylum seekers to Rwanda and externalise decision-making on their asylum claims amply exemplifies Mountz's discussion of similar policies in Australia where the use of geography, off-shoring, and externalisation enable distance to enact a 'politics of erasure' (Mountz 20013b, 30). Under the recently elected Labour government, the UK-Rwanda plan will not be implemented. Nevertheless, and it must be presumed intentionally, even as a prospect, the deal provoked fear and distress for asylum seekers and the migrant community more broadly. As noted previously, a number of reports highlight negative impacts on the health and well-being of migrants in the UK arising from public and media discussion surrounding the deal. It has also helped to fuel fears about migrant arrivals as a potential security threat or an economic burden, which then serves to rationalise their removal. The deal's legacy has also helped stoke racist responses, such as occurred in cities across England in August 2024 (Sinmaz 2024). As Mountz observes, the possibility and use of geography as a vanishing point has ontological and social effects. Asylum seekers are made to disappear, migrants more broadly are distressed and dehumanised, and public fears are fuelled, stoking racism and xenophobia.

In addition to the geography of distance, the legal contestations surrounding the UK-Rwanda plan have had a multi-scalar geography that highlights some of Brexit's false promises and failings. As described above, legal appeals began in the UK's courts then shifted to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France. There, an injunction ruling pending a review of the legality of the deal tossed the case back to UK courts where it was bandied from High Court to Appeals Court to the Supreme Court. And, it is not untenable that issues arising from the UK-Rwanda plan and associated laws may proceed, again, to the European Court of Human Rights, 'given that the case raises important questions of human rights law' (Tan 2023, np). This illuminates how any aspiration that the UK would regain sovereign control post-Brexit was naive at best; as Agnew emphasises, 'control is rarely or never exercised in a zero-sum fashion but involves degrees of cooperation and collaboration with others' (2020, 270).

There are additional issues to note with reference to this multi-scalar back-and-forth legal scene. While the European Court and UK Court's rulings were welcome developments in that they suspended the UK-Rwanda deal preventing the deportation of individuals who are searching for a safe haven, the basis

of the courts' decisions highlights the persistence of colonial logics, a characteristic of vanishing points that Gregory (2007) delineates. The various courts' rulings did not lay fault with the UK's right to implement an externalisation plan; instead, the deciding issue was the 'deficiencies' in Rwanda's asylum system. The judgements concluded that Rwanda is not a safe third country on grounds that its government was unreliable, inexperienced, and untrained. The Appeals Court ruling noted, for instance, that 'the Rwandan government had previously breached a similar Israel-Rwanda deal' (para 102, Tan 2023, np); the 'Rwandan government is unable, yet, to reliably sort genuine from non-genuine refugees' (Tan 2023, np) and 'there was simply insufficient evidence to demonstrate that [Rwandan] officials would be trained adequately to make sound, reasoned, decisions' (para 99, Tan 2023, np). The language and logic of the courts' decisions reproduce imperialist logic and perpetuate the idea that the UK is a more advanced sovereign state. In addition, the subsequent Safety of Rwanda Act instituted processes aimed at addressing the courts' rulings but the processes are also problematic; they include bringing judges from different countries to Rwanda to serve as experts on a new appeals body as well as an international monitoring committee to hear complaints from relocated asylum seekers. In this sense, the legal sphere reproduces and 'embeds colonial histories [and logics . . . in] the contemporary political moment' (Davies et al. 2021, 2309).

Another issue that became clear amidst the spatialised legal batting game that ensued with the UK-Rwanda Agreement is that contestation is more-or-less assumed, and, I suggest, used tactically. Gregory characterises vanishing points as sites of political struggle around law, its interpretation and implementation. I contend that political struggle has been an intrinsic element of the UK-Rwanda deal, one that generates a productive uncertainty and ambiguity for both law and its subjects, in this case asylum seekers and migrants. The uncertainties related to legality, implementation, and enforcement that surrounded the UK-Rwanda Agreement enabled the Conservative government to claim demonstrable action on the so-called migrant crisis. Uncertainties also helped to shore up a defence about how the previous government's efforts were stymied because of the legal system. In short, the law and its contestation draw attention away from the Conservative government's fumbling approach and failure to deliver their anti-immigration manifesto. At the same time, other facets of the expanding migrant quasi-carceral geography, such as those discussed in the following sections, have advanced largely under the radar and hidden from view. In addition, this tactical deployment of the legal sphere subjects asylum seekers to a dehumanisation that renders them invisible. In her analysis of vanishing points, Mountz (2013b) emphasises how invisibilization of externalisation brings about a kind of ontological death characterised by 'prolonged limbo, isolation, and uncertainty' (2013b, 43). The UK-Rwanda deal, the legal wrangling that unfolded with it, and its subsequent unravelling

have produced similar effects for migrants in the UK. In other words, without ever implementing the externalisation agreement and without the need for migrants to be disappeared to some faraway place, limbo and uncertainty are exacerbated.

'The War of law': Invisible Spaces and Tactical Ambiguities of the Juxtaposed 'Control zone' Between the UK and France

While the spectacle of the UK-Rwanda agreement played out, other sites have gone unnoticed where the UK has already externalised and obscured the management of asylum. The arrangement and spatiality of juxtaposed controls between France and the UK illuminate this well; in contrast to the UK-Rwanda plan, the UK's activities in Northern France have been in place for years and remain largely invisible. The juxtaposed control zone also brings us geographically closer to the UK and highlights how distance is not always necessary for the emergence of vanishing points. This section briefly outlines why 'juxtaposed controls' were developed, then, focusing on short-term holding facilities – and holding rooms specifically – as among the spaces where these controls are materialised, I examine how the invisibility of these sites and processes therein produce a procedural grey zone where responsibility and accountability are elided to the point of rendering them vanishing points.

Juxtaposed controls are part of the border control system instituted between nation-states that allow authorities from one state to operate within the territorial borders of another. Concretely, this means UK border authorities can stop, search, question, and detain individuals and vehicles while they are on French soil, and vice versa for French authorities operating in UK territory, within specific, designated areas referred to as the 'control zone'. This arrangement became necessary when the Channel Tunnel, which provides an underground road and rail link between Folkestone, Kent, in South East England and Calais, in Northern France, was built. The legal basis for juxtaposed controls was established with the UK's Nationality, Immigration, and Asylum Act, 2002. Agreements on 'mutual assistance' related to 'frontier controls, policing, cooperation in criminal justice, and public safety' are set out in the Sangatte Protocol, established in 1991, and elaborated in the Additional Sangatte Protocol in 2000, and Treaty of Touquet in 2003 (see Bosworth 2022; Makaremi 2009). Details related to these frontier controls and policing are of particular relevance here. In practical terms, juxtaposed controls are intended 'to simplify and speed up the formalities relating to entry into the State of arrival and exit from the State of departure' (Sangette Protocol 1991, 4). The protocols set out the procedures for issues such as the scope and extent to which each state can 'exercise their national powers' (Sangette Protocol 1991, 5), who has authority as well as where, when, and how that authority is handed over to the other side in matters such as arrest, escort, and

detention, as well as the maximum allowable period, of 24 hours, to hold someone within the 'control zone'. In effect, juxtaposed controls facilitate extra-territorial border controls that are realised in restricted, invisibilized spaces between states.

Short-term holding facilities (STHFs), and holding rooms in particular, are a key element of the control zone infrastructure. Very little is known about short-term holding facilities, whether in the UK or France. They are sites where UK authorities can detain people for short periods, generally up to a maximum of 24 hours, before or upon arriving in the UK or prior to being removed from the state. Individuals may be held while immigration authorities check documents, confirm the right to enter the state, or while transfer arrangements to a detention centre or other accommodation are made. Individuals may also be detained in STHFs during the deportation process, while waiting to be escorted onto a deportation flight. In the UK, the exact number of STHFs is not known. A key source of information about these facilities is the HMIP inspections process. The inspections process expresses the UK state's commitment to the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT). This is a supplement to the UN Convention Against Torture, which establishes an international system for inspecting places of detention to prevent inhuman and degrading treatment.[4] Inspections of STHFs became a statutory requirement in 2006 under the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act, and coincided with OPCAT coming into effect the same year. This is yet another reminder that sovereign and territorial controls, policies, and practices operate in a multi-scalar, global context, as Agnew (2020) notes. A review of HMIP inspections of short-term holding facilities in the UK, completed in 2011, identified 36 facilities at that time, all located at UK ports of entry. There are an additional, unconfirmed number of holding rooms located in proximity to immigration reporting centres, and police stations are also regularly used to temporarily hold immigration detainees. With increases in the number of migrants arriving on the UK's South coast, several more sites were designated as STHFs, including Manston, which I examine in the next section of the paper. Troublingly, in one of only a few national scale inspections of facilities run by Border Force, the law enforcement division of the UK Home Office, conducted in 2020, authorities were unable to specify the exact location or number of STHFs in the UK, which hints at their invisibility and apparent insignificance despite being an essential facet of the state's carceral continuum.

Here, I focus on such facilities in Northern France where there are four UK-governed STHFs in operation. I argue that these sites intersect with the operation of juxtaposed controls and illuminate the blurring of lines of responsibility and accountability to produce a vanishing point that is external but in close proximity to UK sovereign territory, 'offshore from a British perspective [... but] onshore for France' as Bosworth (2022, 508)

notes. These facilities, therefore, illuminate Mountz's (2013b) observation that the logic that underpins externalisation and the infrastructure of vanishing points operate within or nearby sovereign territory as well as at a distance. The four UK-governed facilities in Northern France include two in the town of Coquelles, which is part of the Eurotunnel area, and one facility within each of the ports of Calais and Dunkerque. French authorities run parallel facilities as well as a detention centre, also in Coquelles. Three of the UK facilities are contracted out to the security and facilities management company, Mitie (two at Coquelles and one at Calais), while Eamus Cork Solutions (ECS), a registered private security company in France, runs the Dunkerque facility. The UK's Border Force as well as French border officers, la Police Aux Frontières (PAF), maintain a presence at each of the sites along with a contracted sniffer dog security company called Wagtail. Staff who are UK nationals work at three of the facilities (at Coquelles and Calais); some commute from the UK and some stay at local hotels while completing shift work. The Dunkerque facility is staffed by French workers contracted by ECS. The Sangatte protocols establish the parameters and boundaries of authority and responsibilities for UK and French border control units. In practice, however, execution is much less clear cut. It is within the social space and practices of immigration controls and enforcement that vanishing points emerge.

The holding rooms that are intrinsic to the operation of immigration controls within the control zone are located in areas where public access is restricted. As a result, the UK's prison and detention inspections process and reports are a vital source of information about how these spaces function, and I draw, here, on a review of inspections of the four facilities in Northern France. Tellingly, agreement about the process of inspections has been complicated for these facilities. UK and French authorities have agreed that joint inspections of the facilities should take place; however, 'a lack of jurisdictional clarity' (HMIP 2012, 5) meant that inspections did not take place for a period of six years, from 2005 to 2012. Since 2012, HMIP has inspected several of the sites every two to three years with the most recent inspection in 2019. In addition to this, I draw from work by criminologist Bosworth (2016; 2022; see also Bosworth and Vannier 2020) who is one of only a few researchers to be given access to these facilities and therefore offers important insight.

Like other STHFs, those located in Northern France are invisible and, in certain respects, they are also unremarkable. Holding rooms are transient spaces that physically resemble waiting areas of airport lounges and ferry terminals. Inspection reports detail banal spaces with nondescript decor and institutional furnishings. Typically, they are minimally furnished with chairs and tables bolted to the floor, a station where convenience foods, snacks, and drinks are available along with personal hygiene and toiletry items. Access to materials that cater to 'a diversity of cultural and religious needs' (STHF Rule

21, 12) must also be available. A few sleeping mats, blankets and pillows may also be provided and where families are detained, facilities are expected to accommodate 'family life' 'save to the extent necessary in the interests of security' (STHF Rule 15(1), 11).

Compared to small boat arrivals to the UK, the number of migrants who are held up in the control zone is relatively small. Calculations based on the most recently available inspection reports indicate approximately 900 individuals per month were detained in holding rooms at these four sites in 2019 (Conlon 2022). Periods of confinement are also relatively short, ranging from just under three to over five hours on average with the longest reported confinement being 16 hours, 30 minutes (Conlon 2022). Any individual who is suspected of attempting to enter the UK without a valid entry visa, permit, or similar paperwork may be detained while documentation is checked before they are either allowed to continue to travel on to the UK or handed over to French border police. As previously noted, like other holding rooms, the facilities in Northern France are, arguably, nondescript. Bosworth contrasts these sites with 'detention-as-spectacle' as described by Mainwaring and Silverman (2017) noting that 'the holding centres in Northern France are practically invisible, hidden with layers of security around the ports in which they are located, and difficult to find, even when you know what you are looking for' (Bosworth 2022, 513). Also noteworthy is how time and space fluctuate in these sites. For instance, within the confines of the UK-controlled facilities, France's Central European time zone is adjusted to the UK's Western European time zone, while elsewhere in the control zone, time literally vanishes as it is re-adjusted to the Central European zone. Telephone calls to French phone numbers require an international area code (Conlon 2022). Until relatively recently, food was brought into the UK-operated facilities from across the Channel. In effect, then, these sites are tiny pockets of territorial control outside the UK.

The spatiality of these off-shore, UK-sovereign holding rooms is noteworthy. On French soil yet under the UK's jurisdiction, these short-term holding facilities are materialised – from staffing all the way through to the functional timezone – as extensions of UK territory and control that are embedded within another state's territory. They are also fraught with locational and functional ambiguities. The gap in inspections of holding rooms in Northern France for a period of six years is one expression of how they function or, in practice, do not function. Holding rooms, and juxtaposed control zones more broadly, also highlight a slipperiness of jurisdiction, responsibility, and accountability that is inherent to these sites and that makes their operation problematic. For instance, all the available inspection reports as well as work by advocates repeatedly highlight issues with non-availability of healthcare or limited translation services, inaccessibility of legal advisors, as well as lack of access to outdoor space. Problems like these are

recorded year-on-year in HMIP inspection reports and produce situations such as described by Barrett (2006), np) in reporting on a 2005 inspection, which noted that 'staff were unsure whether English or French law applied and this raised issues about staff and detainee safety [. . .] It meant that staff didn't know whether they could intervene to stop fights, to prevent escapes, to prevent suicide or self-harm'. The ambiguity and slipperiness mean these spaces, as well as the migrants, state agents, and practices therein are hidden and invisible. In effect, they are vanishing points, as Gregory describes 'non-places for non-people' (2007, 209).

Even more concerning is how the space of juxtaposed controls function to thwart and ultimately foreclose migrants' access to asylum in the UK. Among the conditions of the Additional Sangatte Protocol, established in 2000, and also reconfirmed in the 2003 Touquet Treaty has been the denial of asylum claims within the control zone. Individuals wishing to request asylum are handed over to French authorities for applications to be processed by France. In effect, this means the right to asylum in the UK vanishes within the control zone. Drawing on Mountz's work, Timberlake (2020) convincingly contests this arrangement. Distinguishing between extra-territorial control and extra-territorial jurisdiction, Timberlake points out that the UK chooses to exercise selective jurisdiction in this context, using legal powers to criminalise migrants but recusing its capacity to take responsibility for asylum claims. She draws on European case law to argue that extra-territorial jurisdiction encompasses 'state agent authority' (2020, 58) and as a consequence domestic UK law is applicable, which includes the right to submit an asylum claim to UK authorities. But, in practice, in the context of juxtaposed controls, laws are applied in ways that allow the UK to extend sovereign reach when it comes to migration controls and shirk and evade obligations under international law. Such convolutions produce ambiguities where selective elements of law and asylum seekers rights, effectively, vanish.

Needless to say, this 'war [on migrants] fought through law' (Gregory 2007, 207) takes place in the background while the militarised spectacle of UK-French cooperation agreements and multi-million pound/euro investments in deterrence infrastructure is repeatedly paraded out and applauded by state officials. In November 2022, for instance, then Home Secretary, Suella Braverman outlined a 'new partnership with France [that] is underpinned by a set of shared joint strategic objectives and a joint operational plan and builds on the shared commitments under the Sandhurst Treaty' (Home Office 2022b) The Sandhurst Treaty, agreed in 2018, articulates the UK and French states political commitment and financial investment in further securitising Northern French port areas in an attempt to deter migrants. The 2022 announcement is, thus, just one of several enforcement-focused partnership agreements between the UK and France, each involving significant cost for the UK. Syal (2022) reports that between 2015

and June 2022, the UK spent £114 million (approximately €132 million or $142 million) on 'policing the French coast' (np) with an additional £55 million €64 million or $68 million] promised in 2021 by Home Secretary at the time, Priti Patel. The 2022 partnership entails an investment in immigration enforcement in French territory by the UK to the tune of €72.2 million (approx. £62 million or $77 million) with funds being used to increase the number of UK enforcement agents working alongside agents in France, for 'information sharing' as well as use of 'cutting edge surveillance technology, drones, detection dog teams, CCTV, and helicopters to help detect and prevent [Channel] crossings' (Home Office 2022a). Alongside these considerable investments in 'enforcement infrastructure' (see Coddington and Williams 2022), and the further blurring of jurisdictional boundaries with this more proximal offshoring arrangement, we also see how selective visibility alongside invisibility is crucial to the workings of vanishing points. The next section of the paper zooms in even closer to focus on the expanding quasi-carceral continuum of interdiction and confinement within the sovereign territory of the UK. Until very recently, short-term holding facilities and sites such as the Manston Barracks, which I examine in detail, have been largely invisible. Yet, their morphing use and accompanying alterations to underpinning laws, regulation, and guidelines occur apiece with the spectacle of externalisation and the evermore spectacular investments in militarised enforcement in Northern France, and taken altogether these sites provide critical insight on the UK's expanding quasi-carceral geography of vanishing points.

Manston Barracks: Downgrading Responsibility, Dis-Applying Rights, and Expanding the UK's Migrant Quasi-Carceral Geography

Coinciding with the spectacle of post-Brexit geopolitical theatre between the UK and France with substantial investments in surveillance technology and monitoring (Timberlake 2021), as well as the legal 'drama' of off-shoring enforcement to Rwanda, there are also significant changes to the infrastructure of migrant carceral control and containment within the UK. This section shifts focus to the UK, and to short-term holding facilities and related sites intended to accommodate asylum seekers on a temporary basis. Such sites are proliferating as part of the UK government's response to the increase in individuals seeking sanctuary by attempting to cross the English Channel between Northern France and England. Focusing on a former military barracks called Manston, in Kent, I examine media, inspection reports, and parliamentary documents on the use of this facility to provide an account of developments, shifting facility designations, and the expansion of contingent forms of accommodation for migrant arrivals. I then discuss the broader scale and use of facility rule amendments and redesignations, which work to expand sites of

migrant confinement and enable this infrastructure to function as vanishing points of the carceral continuum. I highlight the everywhere and anywhere of these spaces where ambiguities and discretionary power can flourish and that are instrumental to producing vanishing points.

With increases in migrant arrivals via boat across the English Channel, the UK's Home Office has looked at a number of different types of so-called 'contingency accommodation' intended for initial use for asylum seekers until either longer term, dispersal housing or other accommodation is secured or they are deported. Use of hotels in the UK, as elsewhere, ballooned, particularly during the coronavirus pandemic (see Jerrems et al. 2023). Hotel accommodation quickly became problematic for a host of reasons from NIMBY-ism by local residents, as flashpoints for anti-immigrant protests by far right groups, and because they are unsuitable for use for prolonged periods, particularly for vulnerable individuals (Guma et al. 2024). For these reasons and, according to the Home Office, due to 'continued large numbers of arrivals in small boats from France [. . .,] use of military facilities [was deemed] necessary' (Sturge and Gower 2020, 5). Initially, former military barracks including Napier, in Kent, and Penally, in Wales, were used as contingency accommodation. These facilities came under fire from advocates, in the media, and from the government's own inspectors (Esposito and Tazzioli 2023). Penally was closed in late 2021 while Napier barracks has remained in use thanks to implementation of 'special development order' that gave planning permission for it to be repurposed and used to accommodate asylum seekers (see Town and Country Planning, England 2021, no 962). The Manston military barracks, located in England's south-east has been used as an immigration processing centre since 2022. I now turn to a detailed account of the Manston facility in order to highlight how conditions there, as well as the facility's reclassification, shed light on how vanishing points articulate within the borders of the UK.

The facility at Manston served as a British Royal Air Force (RAF) station from 1916 to 2021. It was then used as part of the support infrastructure during COVID-19. In December 2022, Manston opened as an immigration processing centre. The site is intended to accommodate individuals arriving to the UK via boat to the south-east coast at Dover. In theory, migrants are held for a short period for initial processing – which includes security, identity, and health checks – then moved elsewhere, to a detention centre or other long term accommodation. The facility is designed to accommodate up to 1,600 people; in practice, several reports indicate significantly greater numbers, up to 4,000 people, were confined there on a regular basis, some for upwards of 30 days (Committee for the Prevention of Torture CPT 2023; Gentleman 2023).

Several media and investigative reports as well as a prison inspection report have highlighted poor conditions and overcrowding at Manston (Walawalkar, Rose, and Dearden 2023), much like at Napier and Penally barracks. Among

issues highlighted were that 'exhausted detainees slept on floor mats between the rows of chairs [and] were not allowed to go into the fresh air despite some very lengthy stays' (HMIP 2022a, 8). The Chief Inspector of Prisons, Charlie Taylor, noted that conditions deteriorated further after an inspection in July 2022 with 'detainees being held in greater numbers and for much longer periods of time in cramped and uncomfortable conditions, often supervised by staff who have not been suitably trained' (HMIP 2022b, np). By October 2022, the Prisoner Officers Association (POA), which represents workers in the prison sector, issued a statement noting that 'the target of holding people for 24–48 hours is now purely aspirational, people are staying at the Manston facility up to a week' (POA 2022). By mid-October 2022 there were reports of diphtheria, norovirus and scabies outbreaks (Gentleman 2023) and on November 19, 2022, an Iraqi man, Hussein Haseeb Ahmed, who had arrived in the UK a week earlier and was held at the Manston facility, died after he was transferred from the facility to hospital (Taylor 2022a). The site was closed and emptied of detainees in late November (Taylor 2022b) but it subsequently re-opened in December and has been holding migrants routinely since then.

At around the same time, on 15 December 2022, the government quietly amended the rules that underpin short-term holding facilities (STHFs), which is Manston's official designation. With this, a new category for confinement was introduced, which adds to the plethora of concerns about migrants' welfare, wellbeing, and rights if or when they actually make it to the UK. As noted earlier, the precise number of short-term holding facilities across the UK is not known. A 2020 inspection of STHFs at ports of entry noted that 'senior managers could not even tell us with certainty which of their ports actually had detention facilities' (HMIP 2020, 6). A 2023 follow-up national inspection identified 14 facilities at seaports and airports. However, this doesn't include STHFs in several other locations including immigration reporting centres, for instance. Tallying HMIP's published inspections of these facilities and drawing on research by advocates, it appears there are at least 39 STHFs including the ones at ports of entry (Conlon 2022). This lack of knowledge and information points to the invisibility of these spaces relative to their number and role in immigration control, and in comparison with the mediatised spectacle of small boats or the Rwanda plan.

As a whole, facilities such as Manston are governed by 'The Short-term Holding Facility Rules', which came into force in 2018 and set out standards for periods of confinement, provisions for accommodation, health and medical care, welfare, recreation, as well as access to legal supports, the outdoors, and communications. Until December 2022, when the rules were amended, there were two types of temporary spaces used to confine migrants for administrative processing purposes: non-residential short-term holding facilities, or holding rooms, where an individual may be held for up to 24 hours, and residential short-term holding facilities (RSTHFs), where individuals can

be detained for five days or up to a maximum of seven days. Any extension to these periods requires authorisation by the Secretary of State. Manston was designated as a non-residential short-term holding facility. The amended rules brought into being a third facility category, the 'residential holding room' (RHR) where a person can be detained for 'a period of not more than 96 hours unless a longer period is authorised by the Secretary of State' (STHF Rules 2022, np).

Before proceeding further, it's important to acknowledge that the STHF Rules have not always been applied to all such facilities equally. Residential short-term holding facilities are treated differently from non-residential holding rooms, for example. Provisions related to sleeping accommodation, are 'disapplied' (STHF Rules 2022, 10) for holding rooms on the grounds that individuals are supposed to be detained in these facilities for a maximum of 24 hours. More problematically, in the original 2018 Rules, only one of the previously discussed STHFs that form part of the infrastructure of juxtaposed controls in Northern France – Coquelles specifically – came under the purview of the STHF guidelines. 'Statutory instruments' were not in place for the holding rooms at Calais and Dunkirk; instead, per the guidelines, 'the spirit of the STHF Rules should nevertheless be followed there' (Home Office 2018). While this has been updated with the amended 2022 Rules, and said rules apply – or are dis-applied – to each of the holding rooms in Northern France, this highlights the ambiguous character of the regulation of these spaces. Such ambiguities are instrumental to producing vanishing points.

The amended 2022 Rules authorise, distinguish, and elaborate guidelines for the operation of residential holding rooms in addition to clarifying issues related to governance of other facilities, such as discussed above. One of the effects with their elaboration is to make residential holding rooms significantly downgraded facilities. For example, as mentioned above, according to the 2018 Rules, RSTHFs are required to make available separate sleeping accommodation for women and men. With the amended rules, however, residential holding rooms (RHRs) must only 'provide separate sleeping accommodation from detained persons of the opposite sex, *where possible*' (STHF Rules 2022, no. 1345, Rule 14, 2, emphasis added). Other regulations that apply to RSTHFs but not to holding rooms are also 'dis-applied' for residential holding rooms. For instance, for individuals who are held in the latter two types of facilities, access to the internet is at the discretion of the facility manager and, while detained individuals are granted access to a legal advisor, this is only permitted via phone. More troubling, provisions associated with initial medical screening, safeguarding measures, and monitoring indicators of vulnerability, such as suicide risk, are reduced in terms of permitted time frames for assessment and reporting requirements (Evidence to the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee, 2023). This led the

Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee, a parliamentary oversight group, to conclude that 'the extension of the maximum period of detention with the modification and disapplication of key Rules, constitute a dangerous withdrawal of the safeguards that apply to detained people, and a deeply concerning downgrading of the conditions in which they are held' (2023, 5, para 7.1). In effect, then, where the 2018 rules entail the 'dis-application' of numerous, significant provisions for 24-hour holding rooms on the somewhat spurious grounds that individuals are detained for relatively short periods of time, the amended rules further undercut these already limited provisions by applying them to new sites where migrants can be confined for longer time periods.

At Manston, it's clear that the facility was operating in violation of the rules for STHFs prior to implementation of the amended rules. The government's own inspection report noted that 'exhausted detainees were regularly held for more than 24 hours in non-residential accommodation' (HMIP 2022a, 4). Amending the rules for STHFs remedied this problem by adding a new category of sites where migrants can be confined for up to 96 hours. This move proved expedient and strategically useful in several ways. As the Home Office noted 'we require a flexible estate and detention facilities which can respond to operational pressures' (Evidence to the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee 2023, 7). Increasing the number of hours for confinement without the need to authorise an extension of the period of detention is a practical time saver for facility staff and government officials. It reduces the burden of oversight, and with this, diminishes responsibility and accountability. The amended rules effectively set out that people who are held in residential holding facilities (RHR) are granted lesser standards of welfare than individuals confined in residential short-term holding facilities (RSTHFs), and authorities are less accountable to them than to individuals held for 24 hours or less in 'holding rooms'. For those experiencing confinement in facilities like Manston, it's possible there may be few palpable changes to the conditions they encounter. Nevertheless, the expanding number and type of facilities used to contain arriving migrants in the UK, as well as ambiguities surrounding their character, location, and operation produce uncertainties where rights become unclear and where prospects for migrant welfare and security effectively vanish. Commenting on the introduction of residential holding rooms and short-term holding facilities more broadly, legal expert Colin Yeo, noted 'At the whim of the Home Office, any place can become a short-term holding facility. Sometimes it might be a room, sometimes a disused lorry container, sometimes a marquee in a car park. Wherever is used as a short-term holding facility is a short-term holding facility, basically' (Yeo 2022, np). This welter of expediency, 'new types of [facility with 'bespoke time limit[s] and rules' (Evidence to the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee 2023, 6), diminished standards, and lack of clarity around migrants' rights as well as staff and

government responsibilities produces vanishing points that simultaneously expand the UK's migrant quasi-carceral geography.

Conclusion

This paper has presented an account of three spatialised legal vanishing points where the violence of the UK's migrant quasi-carceral geography is expanding. The legal spectacle of the UK-Rwanda Agreement was juxtaposed with its intended effect, which was to render spontaneous migrant arrivals to the UK invisible by disappearing them to Rwanda. The political spectacle of this Agreement was underpinned by legal agreements that were widely contested. By reflecting on contestations of the UK-Rwanda Agreement's legality, a spatialised legal vanishing point is revealed. I have also scrutinised the rules and operation of a number of short-term holding facilities that are hidden within the maze of juxtaposed border controls between the UK and France. These sites are invisible and largely inaccessible to the public, necessitating use of inspection reports as a prism on how they function. Such spaces are fraught with ambiguity that produces a lack of accountability, which enables the UK to shirk responsibilities related to international agreements on refugee rights and protection, and renders an invisibilized space and a jurisdictional vanishing point where the right to seek asylum is foreclosed. The third site analysed narrows in on geographical terrain within the UK to unpick some of the controversy and shifting decisions surrounding accommodation for irregular migrant arrivals who have arrived to the UK via 'small boat' across the English Channel. Focusing on the repurposing and reclassification of a former military barracks at Manston in Kent, I examined how the emergence of new classifications and facility rules undercut provisions and protections for such migrant arrivals and, simultaneously, expand the array of spaces that could, potentially, be constituted as sites for confining migrants. The new rules introduce new layers of regulatory murkiness, expand the 'everywhereness' of potential confinement, and thus produce vanishing points within UK territory. Each of the sites examined articulates distinct legal and spatial characteristics that are expressions of vanishing points, and, taken together, they provide a newly attuned account and framework for understanding recent articulations of the UK's long-established position of hostility towards migrants.

In its examination of vanishing points, the paper augments analyses of the 'regime of visibility' (Tazzioli and Walters 2016, 475) and absences in legal geographies of asylum and migration more broadly (Gill et al. 2020). My analysis calls attention to the interplay between the use of spectacle, what is visible, and what is made or becomes invisible as part of a dynamic, and at times tactical, process. In the spaces between what is visible or invisible, present or absent, are the vanishing points where legal violence along with

the quasi-carceral geography of immigration control flourish. In other words, it is in these lacunae that the machinations of power, subjugation, abjection, and violence, which is to say, the apparatus of vanishing points take shape.

One final, concluding point: this paper brings a new focus in legal geographies of migration by attending to sites where vanishing points are spatialised in closer and closer proximity to and even within the UK's territorial borders. In this way, the paper expands on Mountz's important observations that externalisation policies embolden governments to act in politically 'rogue' ways and, in addition to operating through externalisation, the geography of vanishing points works 'internally to sovereign territory as well' (2013b, 45). I have shown that the UK's Conservative government was prepared for, and even counting on, contestations and ambiguities related to law, policies, jurisdiction, and rights in spaces within and nearby, as well as far away from sovereign territory. This clarifies a significant point about legal vanishing points and also flags some wider implications too. This paper shows that as quasi-carceral geographies of immigration control expand, laws do not disappear entirely; as Gregory notes, disdain for the law does not equate to its dismissal. Indeed, this was clear from a statement by Robert Jenrick, who, from October 2022 to December 2023, served as the UK Immigration Minister; he noted that the UK is committed to meeting 'legal obligations to those who would otherwise be destitute. But we are not prepared to go further' (Walker 2023, np). With the vanishing points that have taken form in closer proximity to the UK, the UK's Conservative government was testing the limits of domestic as well as international laws pertaining to migration and human rights. The violence of legal vanishing points is materialised around such limit testing and 'edges' where there is an endless process of formulation, interpretation, application, contestation, and expansion that produces expanded spaces and extended states of uncertainty for asylum seekers and irregular migrants. Such moves are proliferating in other European states and elsewhere too. For instance, the Danish government has signed an externalisation agreement with Rwanda and several Schengen area states, including Austria, France, and Germany, have recently introduced new internal border control measures. In this context, then, where vanishing points are hidden in plain sight, within defined territories and states of Europe, and where perpetual violence is meted out for asylum seekers and irregular migrants, the idea of Europe as a safe haven becomes – most certainly – questionable.

Notes

1. In July 2024, the Labour Party won a general election in the UK. The Labour government introduced secondary legislation that regulates, and effectively halts, IMA implementation. In this paper, I focus on debate and contestation surrounding the introduction of

laws, such as IMA, and that shrouds other develo pments rather than their practical implementation.
2. £140 million was sent to Rwanda in April, 2022; an additional £100 million was paid in April 2023. The policy's ultimate cost is, as yet, unknown (Migration Observatory, Jan 2024).
3. Exchange rate calculated 2/10/24, £1.00 = $1.26.
4. See:https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/about-hmi-prisons/.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank 'Questioning the Safe Haven' special issue editors: Carolin Fischer, Manuel Insberg, and Sabine Strasse for their guidance and patience. Thank you to fellow contributors and participants at the Safe Haven workshops, University of Bern, and especially to Arshad Isakjee and Thom Davies for their incisive comments. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at University of Sussex and University of Cagliari, my thanks to interlocutors at those events. I am grateful for reviewers' constructive comments and for support from the editorial team at Geopolitics.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Deirdre Conlon http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4063-7914

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