

# Extreme emotions and emotionlessness of UK immigration system make migrants deportable and disposable

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The UK's immigration system uses a combination of strong emotions combined with emotionlessness to cast migrants as simultaneously

'threatening, polluting and irrelevant'—creating a group of people who are, ultimately deportable and disposable, new research reveals.

Across the immigration, asylum, and detention systems, four emotions stand out—anger, disgust, suspicion, and [fear](#)—creating an environment where migrants' emotions and lives are met with disinterest and disbelief, their emotional displays ignored or punished, and immigration decision-makers and personnel act with emotional detachment.

Writing in the journal *Identities*, Dr. Melanie Griffiths from the University of Birmingham, draws on 15 years of research across the UK's immigration and asylum systems to explore how emotion impacts on migrants and administrators.

Dr. Griffiths says, "Although immigration systems are presented as rational and neutral, these four emotions—anger, disgust, suspicion, and fear—are never very far from the surface in the UK; creating a system that is both garishly emotional and yet, seemingly, emotionless.

"The system abounds with varying intensities of anger. From 'fiery' immigration judges losing their temper, to rude Home Office personnel, antagonism, hostility and aggression are widespread.

"Likewise, the immigration system is saturated with anxiety. Immigration Judges worry about tabloid attacks, Home Office staffers are afraid of the repercussions of missing targets, and Ministers suffer chronic fears of being criticized as too 'soft' on immigration."

Dr. Griffiths uses the concept of 'emotional governance'—or the government of emotions of the self and others—to explore how emotions within the immigration system are controlled, managed, manipulated, required, and denied.

Despite a facade of overarching legal rationality, migration bureaucracies employ emotional governance to disenfranchise migrants—fostering racial categorization and domination and creating people deemed simultaneously threatening, polluting and irrelevant.

Dr. Griffiths finds that the four key emotions are so dominant across the UK's immigration system that they should be considered not only characteristic of it, but as actively producing the system that currently operates in the country.

Alongside these intense emotions, immigration practitioners operate through chilling coldness and disinterest—prohibiting or ignoring migrants' emotional displays, and disputing or disregarding the emotions of themselves and migrants.

"Coldness and disinterest are widespread—officials deciding spousal visa applications, for example, question the veracity and strength of love, while those assessing refugee claims query applicants' fears and honesty," commented Dr. Griffiths.

"Feelings of distaste or revulsion are also evident among those operating border policies. Sexuality-based asylum claims may be especially prone to aversion, shame, and humiliation. Equally, housing new asylum arrivals in isolated barges and barracks reflects underlying feelings of contagion and repugnance at people deemed offensive or contaminating."

**More information:** Melanie Griffiths, The emotional governance of immigration controls, *Identities* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/1070289X.2023.2257957](https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2023.2257957)

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