

## "I came home. Is this home?": Post-Brexit Migration and Emotions in *Years and Years*<sup>1</sup>

### "I came home. Is this home?": Migración posBrexit y Emociones en *Years and Years*

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### Resumen

El auge de las producciones audiovisuales sobre fronteras en las últimas décadas se entiende como una posible conclusión a las dificultades impuestas por las políticas de control fronterizo. La serie de ficción televisiva de la BBC, *Years and Years 4*, representa cómo el *Brexit* ha fomentado vulnerabilidades, como la persecución a refugiados, al exacerbar diferencias raciales como la nacionalidad. Debido a la complicación en los tránsitos fronterizos, *Years and Years* (2019) reconsidera el papel de las fronteras para afirmar que son fundamentales para incitar al miedo, el odio y las vulnerabilidades. Partiendo del trabajo de críticos poscoloniales y de afectos como Caroline Koezler, Pavan Kumar Malreddy y Marlena Trocnicke, y Sara Ahmed, analizo críticamente los episodios 4 y 5. En este artículo, propongo que un estudio del miedo, el dolor y la esperanza promueve la toma de acción en los personajes de la serie. En segundo lugar, reflexiono sobre cómo el *Brexit* revela vestigios coloniales reflejados en la nostalgia imperial. Finalmente, sugiero que la nostalgia imperial se transforma en nostalgia familiar, y ocasiona que las personas verbalicen odio hacia lo que les inquieta.

**Palabras clave:** *Years and Years*, *Brexit*, emociones, migración, nostalgia

### Abstract

The rise of border audiovisual productions in recent decades is a possible conclusion to the difficulties imposed by border control policies. The BBC TV fictional series, *Years and Years* (2019), presents how Brexit causes vulnerabilities by exacerbating racial differences, such as the persecution of refugees. Because of the complication in border transits, *Years and Years* (2019) reconsiders the role of borders to claim that they are fundamental in inciting fear, hate, and vulnerabilities. Drawing on the scholarship by Postcolonial and Affect critics such as Caroline Koezler, Malreddy and Tribucke, and Ahmed, I analyse critically episodes 4 and 5 of the series. In this paper, I propose that a study of fear, pain, and hope promotes action-taking in the series' characters. Secondly, I reflect on how Brexit unveils colonial vestiges reflected in imperial nostalgia. Finally, I suggest that imperial nostalgia transforms into familial nostalgia and causes individuals to verbalize hatred toward what unsettles them.

**Keywords:** *Years and Years*, *Brexit*, emotions, migration, nostalgia.

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## I. Introduction

The oppression suffered by refugees and racialised minorities has been represented in audiovisual productions in recent decades as a logical conclusion to the difficulties imposed by border control policies, such as Brexit. Consequently, contemporary film productions have addressed racialised disparities, including the denial of asylum to refugees or their persecution. This is exactly what the BBC limited series *Years and Years* (2019) does. The TV show advances racialised disparities refugees have to endure in post-Brexit Britain. Brexit was a withdrawal from the European Union (EU) posed first in the Referendum in 2016 and became official in 2020. Since Brexit, refugees have recently faced obstacles to entering the UK. Through the denial of aid to refugees, the series foregrounds the trauma suffered by Viktor Goraya after the loss of his partner Daniel Lyons. *Years and Years* mirrors how the imperial nostalgia of post-Brexit society is transformed into familial nostalgia, adamantly provoking unsettlement in refugees and immigrants. Drawing on the scholarship by Brexit and Affect critics such as Caroline Koegler *et al.*, and Sara Ahmed, I analyse post-Brexit migration concerning emotions in episodes 4 and 5. Therefore, I analyse fear, hate, and hope in the series. In addition, I provide a brief background on Brexit and its role in foregrounding the British empire. Finally, I examine unsettlement to show how imperial nostalgia is transformed into familial nostalgia.

Britain's decision to leave the EU on 23 June 2016 marked a historical moment and resulted in hegemonic discourses on border control, globalisation, and Euroscepticism (Shaw, 2021, p. 1). Robert Eaglestone underlines that there exists a tradition among British writers that "addressed Britain's loss of political sovereignty and diminished post-war role of the word stage from a dominant from a dominant player to a disempowered European member state" (Eaglestone 2018, p. 18). Since Brexit, much of its academic criticism has been examined from the perspectives of imperial nostalgia (Koegler *et al.* 2020, Mora-Ramírez 2022, Saunders 2020, Tinsley

2020), *BrexLit* and literature (Alonso-Alonso 2023, Eaglestone 2018, Shaw 2018, Shaw 2021), race and ethnicity (Pitcher 2019, Van Der Zwet *et al.* 2020, Burrell *et al.* 2018, Favell 2020) as well as sociology and politics (Outhwaite 2017, Roe-Crines 2020). Pertinently, Kristian Shaw coined the term "brexlit" to refer to "fictions that either directly respond or imaginatively allude to Britain's exit from the EU, or engage with the subsequent socio-cultural, economic, racial or cosmopolitical consequences of Britain's withdrawal" (18). I would like to suggest that the term "brexlit" could also be applicable for the analysis of films and tv shows on Brexit, as audiovisual texts also respond to these concerns.

Caroline Koegler *et al.* analyse the colonial relics of Brexit to claim that it "has given racism a free pass and hate speech a broader acceptance in society" (2020, p. 586). Along the same lines, Robert Saunders, for example, redefines the vocabulary of nostalgia by highlighting the connection between Brexit and imperial nostalgia. In his words, "terms like 'imperial nostalgia' do scant justice to the complex relationship between Brexit and Empire" (p. 1165). Similarly, I stress that post-Brexit migration complicates how national and migrant identities are defined. Brexit has made the internal crises over the maintenance of what is seen as British identity even more visible. Thus, Brexit has been no more than an instrument to reflect how fragile this identity is. Consequently, this need of maintaining national identity in the UK has rekindled imperial nostalgia for control.

As of the present, few studies have examined film productions concerning Brexit. In the case of *Years and Years*, Teresa Sorolla-Romero has analysed its visual motifs regards to political populism, economic instability, and migratory crisis. While academic attention has been paid to Brexit bringing with it nostalgia, no study to date has examined the affective implications of Brexit and how an analysis of nostalgia is driven by emotions such as fear and hate.

Considering Brexit's implications on social wel-

fare, it has exposed vulnerabilities and affected racialized individuals. According to Judith Butler, vulnerability is an “existential condition, since we are all subject to accidents, illness, and attacks that can expunge our lives quite quickly [...] [and it] accounts for the disproportionate exposure to suffering” (2016, p. 25). Butler also differentiates the distribution of vulnerability, as there are populations “more subject to arbitrary violence than others” (2004, p. xii).

Butler’s first approach to vulnerability (2004) emphasised vulnerable otherness as the basis of humanity. However, in rethinking vulnerability and resistance, Butler noted that “those who gather to resist various forms of state and economic power are taking a risk with their own bodies, exposing themselves to possible harm” (2016, p. 12). In addition, “these bodies, in showing this precarity, are also resisting those very powers; they enact a form of resistance that presupposes vulnerability of a specific kind and opposes precarity” (p. 15). Following Butler’s contention on the distribution of vulnerability, Leticia Sabsay highlights that “the act of exposing vulnerability does question how vulnerability is extremely ill-distributed” (2016, p. 297). This goes by what Sabsay calls “permeability”, vulnerability as the capacity to be affected (p. 286).

Thus, another point of interest in the series’ analysis is the study of emotions. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Sara Ahmed offers the vision that the national body identifies others as the source of what endangers the nation. Similarly, she pinpoints in a later work, *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), that multiculturalism might become happy if it is part of a national ideal. In this way, multiculturalism is read as something unsafe to the nation, and it seems clear that the national identity is under threat when there are political struggles. She stresses that there tends to be a concern when political struggles expose that national belonging is compromised (Ahmed, 2010, p. 159). However, she also describes the political dimension of emotions and how they shape and influence power dynamics, as well as the way they are rooted in social practices, altering nationhood

and identities (Ahmed, 2014). Subsequently, I will describe Ahmed’s insights on hate and its defensive uses to demonstrate how discourses on hate are implicit on Brexit.

Ahmed proposes the ‘affective economies of hate’ as the circulation of signs of hate that happens when “objects of emotions [such as the refugees] circulate or are distributed across a social as well as psychic field” (2014, p. 45). Hate is a manifestation against and of objects that have been othered and threatens intrinsic stability through the figures of hate “that works to materialise the very ‘surface’ of collective bodies” (p. 46). Consequently, hate is an ambivalent emotion becoming “an investment in an object (of hate) whereby the object becomes part of the life of the subject even though (or perhaps because) its threat is perceived as coming from outside” (p. 50). Therefore, there is an attachment between the subject and the hated object, and it is pertinent in the creation of defensive uses of hate.

Hate has functioned from its ‘defensive use’ as a confrontational mechanism that protects an object previously considered to be loved, “generat[ing] its object as a defence against injury” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 42). Therefore, analysing the defensive uses of hate expounds how “hate does not reside positively in signs, but circulates or moves between signs and bodies” (p. 60). The defensive narrative of hate often incorporates differentiation between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Bridget Anderson (2013) proposes that “modern states portray themselves [...] as a *community of value*” (p. 2), those individuals who have shared values and are integrated into the community. Anderson also distinguishes ‘failed citizens’ as “those individuals and groups who are imagined as incapable of, or fail to live up to, liberal ideals” (2013, p. 4). Consequently, the defensive uses of hate establish “a perceived injury in which the proximity of others (burglars/bogus asylum seekers) is felt as the violence of negation against both the body of the individual [...] and the body of the nation” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 48).

Following this affective train of thought, Brexit

and border control in the UK may problematise the survival of migrants and refugees. After Brexit, border control in the UK strictly permits the crossing of documented citizens who meet the standards established by the British government. In this way, the British border operates as a form of rejecting people not accepted by the political system. This image is strongly powerful since it shows how Brexit has been designed as a system that rejects otherness. For instance, the series shows that Brexiteers see refugees as asylum seekers who go after their resources. Therefore, in this study, I use Ahmed's view of hate and fear to illustrate how these emotions mobilise individuals to act in the way they believe necessary.

## II. Navigating Hate and Fear in *Years and Years*

*Years and Years* is a British BBC limited series created by Russell T. Davies and first aired in 2019. It spans 15 years, from 2019 to the 2030s, and offers a dystopian vision of the near future through the prism of the Lyons family. The central characters are siblings Stephen (Rory Kinnear), Daniel (Russell Tovey), and Edith Lyons (Jessica Hynes)<sup>3</sup>. Stephen is a financial advisor dealing with economic instability and family pressures. Daniel is a housing officer, and their sister, Edith, is an activist who returns to the family after years abroad. *Years and Years* also features Vivienne Rook (Emma Thompson), a businesswoman who rises to power through her populist Four Star Party. Of particular significance is the character of Viktor Goraya (Maxim Baldry), who flees his country Ukraine due to persecution for his sexuality.

The TV show presents the Lyons family as a familiar model of British society facing drastic changes and challenges similar to those of the nation at large. The limited series depicts a post-Brexit Britain, the loss of power on the world stage, the rise of new authoritarian political figures, and the refugee

migration crisis. In parallel, the Lyons family also suffer their internal crises, reflecting the instability and uncertainty following Brexit. Therefore, *Years and Years* presents a dystopian yet realistic vision of Brexit. In the series, Daniel Lyons falls in love with Viktor Goraya.

Soon after they meet, they develop a romantic relationship, which leads to Daniel's divorce from Ralph Cousins (Dino Fetscher). Ralph sees Viktor as the one who stands in the way of his relationship with Daniel. National identity itself may generate a sense of belonging and pride that, when threatened, produces an emotional wound similar to the loss of a significant family figure. This is exactly what Ralph experiences. He feels a sort of familial nostalgia grounded in melancholia as he wants to regain his family unit. This nostalgia manifests in Ralph's interactions and decisions, seeking to return to an idealised past in which he was with Daniel while facing their separation, as Daniel fell in love with Viktor. In this way, the viewer can see how imperial nostalgia for control translates into the family sphere. Ralph suffers from the separation and, as a result, denounces Viktor for deportation. In this act of revenge, Ralph shows his hatred for Viktor and acts *in the name of love* against him. Ahmed aptly concludes that "in the resistance to speaking *in the name of love*, [...], it is possible to find a different kind of line or connection between the others we care for, and the world to which we want to give shape" (2014, p. 141). Acting out of his love for Daniel, Ralph deports Viktor as a defensive use of his hatred for Viktor. As Ahmed (2014) points out, the circulation of emotions "connects bodies to other bodies" through movement (p. 11). She also adds that:

I become aware of bodily limits as my bodily dwelling or dwelling place when I am in pain. Pain is hence bound up with how we inhabit the world, how we live in relationship to the surfaces, bodies and objects that make up our dwelling places. Our question becomes not so much what *is* pain, but what *does* pain do. (2014, p. 27)

3 To avoid repetitions, the name of the actors and actresses will be mentioned once when they are referred to for the first time.

Pain is an unsettling emotion and can lead to triggering other actions. For this reason, the series perfectly reflects emotions in motion. After all, emotions play a fundamental role in our bodily actions in that they generate physiological reactions. Emotions express emotive choices that trigger future reactions and reflect the way individuals think and act shaping their interaction with the world. Or as Ahmed (2010) aptly puts it, “[w]e are moved by things. In being moved, we make things” (p. 25). Exemplifying that, Daniel goes through different situations that cause his emotions to change throughout the series. Nonetheless, as Ahmed (2014) underlines, one can understand that “[w]hilst pain might seem self-evident – we all know our own pain, it burns through us – the experience and indeed recognition of pain as pain involves complex forms of association between sensations and other kinds of ‘feeling states’” (p. 23).

Emotions like hate, pain, and fear lead the characters to make decisions that influence their future. A clear example of this is when Ralph is happy with Daniel. However, when Daniel meets Viktor, his happiness translates into hatred towards Viktor. Emotions are what move Ralph to denounce Viktor. He wants to regain his family unit, and to do so he has to get rid of Viktor. Ralph’s suffering after his divorce makes him act against Daniel and Viktor’s happiness. The power of emotions is so vast that Ralph fails to see that Daniel is happier with Viktor than with him. As Ahmed (2010) aptly explains in *The Promise of Happiness*, the traumatic events caused by melancholia could move to happiness if there is a self-erasure of grief:

This is how happiness becomes a forward motion: almost like a propeller, happiness is imagined as what allows subjects to embrace futurity, to leave the past behind them, where pastness is associated with custom and the customary. [...] To become an individual is to assume an image: becoming free to be happy turns the body in a certain direction. (p. 137)

From this perspective, Ralph’s inability to overcome pain could be read as a refusal to embrace

resilience and to forget his past with Daniel<sup>4</sup>. This may be because melancholia could erase the possibility of bouncing back.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, I claim that Ralph experiences what Susie O’Brien (2017) calls “broken resilience” (p. 59), when resilience is compromised and the ability to bounce back is erased. Thus, as Ralph acts individually instead of seeking help in a group, he ends up not only not overcoming grief but also mobilising his hate towards Viktor.

Even though hate and pain negate Ralph, as shown in the series, the possibility of happiness, fear emerges as a defensive use of hate to resist pain.<sup>6</sup> Daniel is afraid of losing Viktor, but it is in his fear that he finds a way of helping him: “We’ve got to get him into a country that grants asylum but to do that he has to cross the border [illegally]” (Davies, 2019, Episode 3, 09:25-09:27). In this example, fear is transformed into hope. Henry Giroux (2004) contributes to the definition of hope stating that

Hope becomes meaningful to the degree that it identifies agencies and processes, offers alternatives to an age of profound pessimism, reclaims an ethic of compassion and justice, and struggles for those institutions in which equality, freedom, and justice flourish as part of the ongoing struggle for a global democracy. (p. 39)

Hope is what makes Daniel act to help Viktor. He loves him. His desire to be with Viktor leads him to persuade his sister Edith Lyons (Jessica Hynes) to

4 For a comprehensive study on resilience narratives, see Ana M. Fraile-Marcos (2020).

5 As discussed by Eva Darias-Beautell (2020), this could be a response to the lack of resilient capacities to bounce back from adversity (p. 170). However, she also underlines that in colonial, postcolonial, and decolonial contexts, there are two modes of resilience, namely subaltern resilience, and creative resilience (p. 171). Nonetheless, in this study, I pay some attention to broken resilience.

6 I argue that happiness is not quite achieved in the series because of the restrictions in border control, deportations, and the dangers of immigrating without documentation. In this way, the dystopian post-Brexit society of the limited series could be read as an impossibility to achieve happiness.

get him false passports. Thus, Daniel and Viktor go to an unnamed place in the series to get fake passports and enter the UK “legally” because he hopes to live with Viktor and be happy. At this moment, Aلودie (Tamar Baruch), a woman who scams Daniel and Viktor, requests them money and Daniel’s passport to copy. He gives it to her, but then she leaves with the passports and the money. It is significant to note that from this moment Daniel Lyons becomes an undocumented citizen (Mora-Ramírez, 2022, p. 8).

In addition, his undocumented status makes him vulnerable, but he could also be considered a resilient character since he adapts to adversities and mobilises his vulnerability to try to survive. As Ana M. Fraile-Marcos (2020) puts it, “[r]esilience is, therefore, linked to the capacity of beings—human or nonhuman, individual or collective—to withstand adversity, to endure by being flexible, to adapt to conditions of crisis” (p. 1). What is significant about Daniel is that he is willing to help Viktor even after having lost his passport. He loves and feels compassion for Viktor as he is the one he is truly captivated by. This goes following Didier Fassin’s discussion on the mobilisation of positive emotions, such as compassion: “Expressing sympathy for the asylum seeker or the undesirable immigrant holds fewer benefits for that figure than it has for us, as we show how humane we finally are” (Fassin, 2005, p. 382). After this event, Daniel and Viktor get on a boat to enter the country illegally. However, in this scene, other migrants board, and the boat gets full. He knows that he is in an even more vulnerable position, but he decides to risk it. They cross the border, but Daniel ends up drowning and his body is left on a beach. In this case, Daniel’s resilience operates against him because of restrictive migration policies such as Brexit. In the following section, I will focus on how Brexit revives imperial nostalgia, and how it transforms into familial nostalgia.

### III. Brexit and the Revival of Imperial Nostalgia

An analysis of these emotions can also be used to examine the role of nostalgia in the series. The

series establishes a post-Brexit society in which refugees encounter several racial disparities in living in the UK. For example, it accounts for politics that is based on Brexit mottoes, such as “Britain comes first,” “putting Britain back on its feet”, “Brexit means Brexit” or the need of “taking back control.” These slogans are present in the series when Vivienne Rook (Emma Thompson), the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, states that “in standing alone this country has never been more magnificent. I promise you freedom and the ability to enjoy that freedom! An emboldened society with the strength to enable itself!” (Davies, 2019, Episode 5, 01:06-02:10). As Vivienne Rook argues, imperial nostalgia originates in the belief that the UK can play once again an important role as a global power. Consequently, the series uses political events, such as Brexit and the rise of populist Vivienne Rook, to directly impact the lives of the Lyons family. Thus, the viewer could see how national crises such as Brexit also have personal repercussions.

Through the creation of exclusionary slogans such as those inciting to take back control, the series shows how its dystopian vision ceases to be speculative and resembles reality. It is therefore important to note that imperial nostalgia is based on the rejection of non-British people and those outside the standards of the nation, including Black, LGTBIQ+, and refugees among others. An illustration of this is when former Prime Minister Johnson (2020) advocates for the control of legal and illegal immigration concerning the COVID-19 pandemic:

[...] we are all right, to say Black Lives Matter; [...] But I must also say that we are in a time of national trial, when for months this whole country has come together to fight a deadly plague. After such sacrifice, we cannot now let it get out of control. [...] We have a democracy in this country. If you want to change the urban landscape, you can stand for election, or vote for someone who will. (Johnson, 2020, 1:49-3:14)

It is remarkable how this 2019 series advances the events that occurred in 2020, advocating not

only a dystopian perspective to Brexit but also a futuristic one. The problem with this speech is that the PM blames black and racialised communities for ignoring the rules against COVID-19.<sup>7</sup> However, what is curious about this speech is that Boris Johnson puts the focus on Black people racializing them without considering that they may be British. In other words, the former PM states in his speech that he will not allow the situation to get out of control. However, he may not have considered that people belonging to minority communities were born in the UK. Therefore, this fact demonstrates a nostalgia for the imperial past in which it is felt necessary to return to the UK where white, powerful people controlled everything.

The pro-Brexit division of British and non-British citizens goes by Anderson's reflection on the community of value: "The community of value is defined from outside by exclusion, and from inside by failure, but the excluded also fail, and the failed are also excluded" (2013, p. 5). The campaign to leave the EU frequently emphasised the need to regain control and differentiate between British and non-British citizens. According to Ahmed (2014), "the failure of hate to be located in a given object or figure, which allows it to generate the effects that it does" (p. 49).

This imperial nostalgia for control in turn provokes the rejection of minority groups. The imperial nostalgia reflected in the slogans "Britain comes first," "putting Britain back on its feet" and "taking back control" create the rise of hatred as a response to a possible redefinition of national identity. There is a tendency to control and harm which threatens national identity when national identities in the UK are seen to be under threat. In other words, the need for control arises when a redefinition of what is considered British is jeopardised. In the series, this is reflected when Ralph, after divorcing Daniel, denounces Viktor. This becomes the first instance of hatred about what is different since the fear of change controls people's emotions.

*Years and Years* illustrates how policies taken by Vivienne Rook affect refugees. At the beginning of the limited series, she is a controversial media celebrity who ends up founding the populist Four Star Party, taking advantage of public discontent with Brexit to gain media influence. Her influence leads her to eventually be elected Prime Minister of the UK, embodying a populist and authoritarian style of government. Her policies are confrontational, focus on immigrants, and promote nationalist feelings. Rook successfully manipulates public emotions such as fear and nostalgia to consolidate power, exemplifying the use of defensive hatred described by Ahmed. She presents herself as a defender of the nation in the face of threats, thereby justifying her extreme measures and causing unrest and uncertainty. Her political measures include the creation of *Erstwhile* facilities, and detention centres with poor sanitary conditions to control immigration and leave refugees and immigrants to die. This is originated in the belief that when there are too many immigrants it is necessary to remove them so that they do not destabilise the prosperity of the country.

At the beginning of the series, Stephen Lyons (Rory Kinnear), Daniel's brother, appears to have a relatively stable life. His main concern is the safety and well-being of his family. As the political and economic situation in the UK decays, especially with Vivienne Rook's rise to power and the impact of Brexit, Stephen faces the financial crisis. Stephen makes questionable decisions to protect his family, including compromising with policies passed by Vivienne Rook that were initially contrary to his values. After Daniel's death in the series, Stephen Lyons starts working for Vivienne Rook, sending immigrants and refugees to detention centres. Mobilising his hatred of Viktor to defend himself from pain, Stephen decides to send Viktor to an *Erstwhile* detention centre to let him die. This comes as a clear response to his hatred for Viktor. Members of the Lyons family have different views on Rook's policies and Brexit, generating internal conflicts and resentment within the family. These tensions translate into a reflection of how hatred, used to

7 See Pedro Mora-Ramírez (2022) for further information on this speech.

protect an idealised family identity, can tear apart internal relationships when perceptions of threat and protection become points of confrontation. Stephen knows that migration policies after Brexit can risk his brother's life and thus does not see his relationship with Viktor as right. Consequently, when Daniel dies, Stephen is enraged with Viktor because he believes him to be the one to blame for dismantling their family unit.

While Stephen manages to do this by working for Vivienne Rook, the longing that Stephen and Vivienne feel is significantly different. Vivienne Rook firmly believes that the country needs to return to what it once was, verbalising imperial nostalgia. It is noteworthy that colonial remains of Brexit and imperial nostalgia are dismantled by the fact that a country that makes life difficult for immigrants is also the same country that needs immigrants to exist and to remain a world power.

It is vital to note at this point that the series shows no difference between imperial nostalgia and postcolonial melancholia since the latter refers to “the feelings, insecurities, and anxieties that have marked the necessary restructuring of British narratives of identity and narratives about itself in the wake of empire and the critical interventions of postcolonial studies” (Cummings, 2020, p. 605). Priyamvada Gopal, for example, has noted that celebratory accounts of empire centre the attention on its end (Gopal, 2019, p. 3) and decolonial approaches to a forgetting of empire (Gopal, 2016). Significantly, she coined the term ‘anti-imperial amnesia’ to refer to this need of forgetting the empire. However, this narrative is often diminished by some whose national identity is intrinsically grounded in imperial nostalgia.

Imperial nostalgia in the series is depicted to foster conspiracy theories, where secrecy and privacy about taking back control over the country limit dissidence, as is the case of Vivienne Rook.<sup>8</sup> However, Stephen's imperial nostalgia translates into

familial nostalgia, as he wants to regain his family unit once he loses his brother. Consequently, familial nostalgia turns into suffering and hatred when people suffer a family loss. Just as in the series, it is Stephen's hatred of Viktor that drives him to send him to an Erstwhile detention centre. According to Ahmed (2004), “hate generates its object as a defence against injury[, which is translated into] such defensive uses of hate within fascist discourse” (p. 42). Therefore, Stephen denounces Viktor as having a sense of revenge and as an attempt to heal the death of his brother.

Imperial nostalgia denoted by the Brexit political wing leads to a tightening of border control. Consequently, the only way for Daniel and Viktor to return to the UK is to travel by boat illegally as their papers were stolen. Thus, by banning entry to people without documentation, Brexit policies reflect how imperial nostalgia excludes their identities. This is particularly pertinent as an “identity is not fixed, but is formed and evolves according to factors such as culture, ethnicity, race or the place of belonging” (Mora-Ramírez, 2022, p. 16). In the series, Brexit policies end up excluding even British citizens without documentation as they have no way of proving they are British. Therefore, it is possible to affirm that Brexit policies cause the death of Daniel Lyons. What the series does not clarify is why Daniel's family blames Viktor rather than the country's political system. However, grief turns to hatred when individuals face traumatic experiences. Accordingly, perhaps Daniel's family blames Viktor because they believe he is the one who convinces Daniel to help him. However, Daniel does so because he believes it is the right thing to do and because he hopes to live happily with the person he loves.

#### IV. Conclusion

An analysis of the series *Years and Years* (2019) offers an affective view of Brexit and post-Brexit society. The characters offer representations of fear, pain, and hope and the episodes deal with recurring themes that integrate identities and different affects present in post-Brexit British society. In this paper, I

8 I am grateful to Jorge Diego-Sánchez for pointing this out.



have shown how the series offers a post-Brexit perspective not only based on imperial nostalgia but also on the fact that the whole socio-political dynamic of the contemporary UK transforms imperial nostalgia into familial nostalgia. The representation of Viktor as the Other and Daniel's death may thus establish the role of emotions, opening a space for how emotions cause people to act.

This article has highlighted that the series links emotions and nostalgia, creating unease in the characters. *Years and Years* depicts Brexit as a tool of hatred towards refugees and immigrants. Through the representation of Brexit, the series contributes to the portrayal of how racism is present in Brexit policies when there is something that stands in the way of the national body. Indeed, the series encourages a redefinition of Britishness, while opening the door to representations of racism in British society today. The series also displays the dichotomy between happiness and pain, in which one cannot exist without the other. It is essential to note that one way to resist unhappy emotions is through resistance. The series advocates how Daniel uses his emotions as a form of resistance to achieve happiness. Resistance emerges, therefore, as a capacity to challenge systemic racism and any form of oppression. Nevertheless, much more conceptual works need to be done to discuss the relationship between notions of resistance, vulnerability, and agency. If the debate is to be moved forward, a better understanding of the mobilisation of vulnerability to wilful, resistance subjects such as Daniel and Edith Lyons should be developed.

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