Weaponising Gendered Violence: An Analysis of Femonationalist Logics in British Parliamentary Discourse

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Academic Year: 2024-25

Unit: POLI31555

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This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of BSc in Politics and International Relations

I declare that the research contained herein was granted approval by the SPAIS Ethics Working Group

Dedication

For Mum and Dad. Thank you for being the most incredible support throughout this journey - I wouldn't be where I am today without your constant encouragement and belief in me.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Michelle Cini, for her invaluable guidance on this dissertation. Beyond my academic work, I am especially grateful for her kindness and time throughout all three years of my undergraduate studies.

I would also like to thank my friends for the unwavering support, encouragement, and laughs through it all. A special thank you to Aidan - for always being the best.

Abstract

This dissertation centers on the concept of femonationalism - the phenomenon whereby nationalists co-opt feminist themes to advance exclusionary, nationalist agendas; specifically anti-Islam and anti-immigration campaigns under the banner of gender equality. While not exclusive to the far-right, femonationalism has become an increasingly effective strategy for such nationalist parties to bolster their appeal. By contributing to the growing body of literature offering context-specific analyses of femonationalism, this dissertation answers the research question: *How do femonationalist logics operate in British parliamentary discourse on violence against women and girls (VAWG)?* Drawing on theoretical frameworks of femonationalism, nationalism, and intersectionality, it analyses three case studies: the murders of Sarah Everard, Sabina Nessa, and the Southport stabbings of Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe, and Alice da Silva Aguiar. Employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and a comparative approach, femonationalist logics were found to operate both explicitly through securitising rhetoric, and subtly through selective silences. The research identifies three key discursive operations: racialised political mourning; the varied framing of VAWG depending on the racialised identity of the perpetrator; and the reliance on state-centred solutions that obscure structural inequalities. This dissertation argues that, upon comparison, the subtle use of selective silences and securitised framings emerge as key discursive practices in parliamentary discourse to construct VAWG as a threat rooted in 'foreign' cultures, reinforcing a national imaginary defined by exclusion. These findings advance femonationalist literature by demonstrating that, even within formal political arenas like parliament, femonationalist logics continue to be subtly mobilised - often through strategic silences. These omissions play a crucial role in shaping how certain acts of VAWG are framed and discussed, where femonationalist logics emerge to influence who is grieved, who is problematised, and who is marginalised - contributing to the construction of nationalist narratives that delineate the boundaries of belonging and legitimacy.

Word Count: 9854

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the resurgence of right-wing nationalist movements across Europe (Norris & Inglehart, 2019: 9) has been accompanied by a growing trend in their appropriation of feminist themes to advance nationalist agendas. Sociologist Sara Farris (2017) identifies this development in her concept: *femonationalism* - a portmanteau for 'feminist and democratic nationalism' (Farris, 2017: 4) which encapsulates the exploitation of feminist themes to advance anti-Islam and anti-immigration campaigns under the banner of gender equality (Farris, 2017: 4). Farris traces the mainstreaming of femonationalism to the success of far-right parties in the 2014 European Parliament elections, noting how these groups increasingly position themselves as defenders of women's rights - especially in relation to violence against women and girls (VAWG) perpetrated by immigrant men (Farris, 2017: 4). Given that femonationalism has been identified as a key political strategy for the contemporary far right to enhance both appeal and legitimacy (Farris, 2017; Möser et al., 2022), studying it is essential to understanding how this phenomenon is strategically mobilised - and why its narratives resonate so powerfully in contemporary political discourse.

1.1 Literature Review and Research Question

As Möser et al. (2022: 5) observe, understanding how "the Right has addressed sexual politics in contemporary Europe" has only recently received sustained scholarly attention - largely prompted by the conceptual development of concepts like homonationalism and femonationalism. Femonationalism was directly informed by Puar's (2018) concept of homonationalism, which refers to the perceived superiority of cultures that embrace an "exceptional form of national homonormativity"(Puar, 2018: 2). While Farris' seminal work, *In the Name of Women's Rights*, remains the foundational text on femonationalism, recent publishments like *Paradoxical Right-Wing Sexual Politics in Europe* (Möser et al., 2022), continue to broaden and refine the scope of the discussion. This is accompanied by a growing body of journal articles which have examined femonationalism across diverse contexts, engaging with individuals, political parties, and state policies. These include analyses of femonationalism's institutionalisation in shaping policy and media narratives (Bauer et al., 2023), its use in Swiss parliamentary debates on female genital mutilation (Bader & Mottier, 2020), and its articulation within the discourse of the Fratelli d'Italia party (Colella, 2021), among others. The varied focus of existing studies underscores a defining characteristic of femonationalism as: "a specific set of ideas … constantly reconfigured by the actors grasping them" (Möser et al.,

2022: 6). These reconfigurations are shaped by the specific political, cultural, and social contexts in which femonationalism emerges, making its manifestations highly context-dependent. While femonationalism is undoubtedly a highly relevant concept, scholars like Fernandes et al. (2025: 2) have called for an “established set of empirical indicators to allow us to measure femonationalism across space and time”, as the current literature lacks such a standardised framework. However, as understandings and applications of femonationalism are constantly evolving, it remains crucial to continually investigate case studies and collect empirical data to advance femonationalism with novel concepts and analytical frameworks (Möser et al., 2022: 5). This dissertation seeks to contribute by offering a context-specific analysis of femonationalism and employing comparative analysis as an analytical tool to illuminate the nuanced operations of femonationalist logics.

1.2. Framework and Structure

This dissertation investigated the question: *How do femonationalist logics operate in British parliamentary discourse on violence against women and girls?*

In relation to the question, *femonationalist logics* refer to the discursive patterns that selectively align feminist themes with nationalist aims. While Farris’ original theorisation of femonationalism primarily focused on overt far-right discourses, this dissertation extends the concept to show that the reproduction of femonationalist logics - specifically in a parliamentary setting - is not always intentional or explicit, but is evident upon comparative analysis. *Operate* refers to how these logics function within discourse - how they are produced, and their effects on the wider framing of gendered violence.

In addressing this question, this dissertation also addressed the following goals:

1. To examine how femonationalist logics operate in discussions of gendered violence to construct national identity, or reinforce other nationalist narratives.
2. To explore how the operation of femonationalist logics is shaped by the intersectional identities of both victims and perpetrators.

By analysing three case studies: the murders of Sarah Everard, Sabina Nessa, and Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe, and Alice da Silva Aguiar, the research compared how British politicians selectively framed such violence to ultimately reproduce exclusionary, securitised narratives that greatly omitted structural causes of VAWG and its intersectional realities.

Britain offers a distinct and timely backdrop for studying femonationalism, particularly in the post-Brexit context, which has fuelled exclusionary nationalism and intensified anti-immigrant sentiment (Bell, 2020: 364; Hester, 2021: 249). As a former imperial power undergoing a process of post-Brexit national reorientation, Britain presents a unique site where nationalist rhetoric intersects with gender politics in specific and evolving ways. Unlike other European countries such as France or Italy, Britain remains largely underexamined in the femonationalist literature, with only a few studies (e.g., Fanghanel, 2022; Calderaro, 2023) addressing its specific political context.

This dissertation is structured as follows: Chapter two outlines the theoretical framework consisting of three concepts - femonationalism, nationalism, and intersectionality. Chapter three discusses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as this dissertation's key methodology, and justifies the selection of case studies. Chapters four, five, and six analyse the murders of Sarah Everard, Sabina Nessa, and Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe, and Alice da Silva Aguiar - contextualising discussions surrounding each and introducing key themes and findings. Chapter Seven compares these findings and the CDA to analyse how femonationalist logics operate within the parliamentary discourse of the case studies. Chapter Eight concludes by synthesising the dissertation's key discoveries and their significance, before acknowledging limitations and providing recommendations for future works.

Through comparison of the three case studies, this dissertation was able to identify how femonationalist discourse operated not solely through overt racialised rhetoric, but through selective silences - subtle omissions that shaped how the case studies were framed, understood, and discussed. Crucially, these patterns of exclusion and emphasis become legible only through comparison, revealing how nationalist narratives are sustained subtly through normative assumptions. By comparing these cases, this dissertation establishes comparison as a critical mode of analysis for identifying the implicit operations of femonationalist logics, while also underscoring the importance of intersectionality in illuminating how the operation of these logics vary depending on the identities of victims and perpetrators.

Ultimately, this dissertation found that femonationalist logics operated in British parliamentary discourse on VAWG in three key, interlocking ways. First, racialised political mourning elevated certain victims - predominantly white women - reproducing a gendered and racialised moral order in which only some lives are deemed sufficiently visible, mournable and "of the nation", while others remained peripheral or invisible. Second, securitised framing cast misogyny as an

external cultural threat whenever the perpetrator was racialised, reinforcing “us” versus “them” binaries. Third, the strategic obscuration of structural inequalities - through a near exclusive focus on state-centred solutions such as institutional reform and border control - recast VAWG as a ‘foreign’ pathology originating beyond Britain’s borders. Through this, parliamentary discourse subtly co-opted feminist themes to legitimise state authority and reinforce nationalist narratives, while deflecting attention from the structural conditions that fundamentally produce gendered violence. These findings underscore how femonationalism not only entrenches state power and exclusionary logics, but also poses profound challenges to efforts aimed at eradicating the root drivers of gendered violence - underscoring the critical need for continued research into femonationalist practices.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter introduces femonationalism, nationalism, and intersectionality as foundational concepts to this dissertation's analysis. Femonationalism is first introduced as necessary for identifying the co-option of feminist themes in nationalist discourse, followed by a discussion of nationalism as the ideological context that shapes and informs this discourse. Then, an intersectional approach is justified to explore how compounding social identities can shape the way VAWG is framed. To conclude, this chapter underscores how these concepts interact to provide a comprehensive theoretical framework for analysing femonationalist logics in the political discourse of VAWG.

2.1 Femonationalism

Femonationalism serves as this dissertation's central concept for identifying and analysing the appropriation of gender equality within anti-Islam, and more generally anti-immigration political narratives. Drawing on critiques from postcolonial feminism and critical race studies, femonationalism identifies when 'othered' men (particularly Muslims) are framed as threats to women's rights - a narrative that simultaneously positions Western nations as bastions of gender progressiveness that ought to save 'othered' women from their own regressive cultures (Farris, 2017: 55).

In Farris' analysis of femonationalism, she examines France (Marine Le Pen and Rassemblement national), Italy (The Lega Nord), and the Netherlands (Geert Wilders and Partij voor de Vrijheid). Farris' analysis makes femonationalism's central contradiction clear. While these nationalist right-wing parties advocate for women's rights and equality as a core 'Western' value when it benefits their nationalist agendas, they nonetheless remain loyal to their traditional antifeminist politics and simultaneously promote policies that encourage traditional roles for women (Farris, 2017: 28). Embracing this paradox has benefited these parties by modernising their public image, allowing them to be seen as trustworthy political forces more widely accepted in mainstream politics (Farris, 2017: 28). In this sense, femonationalism is a crucial, modern political strategy for emerging right-wing nationalist parties; by co-opting the very 'progressive' feminist ideals they typically oppose, these parties are able to maintain political legitimacy and appeal, while advancing their exclusionary nationalist and anti-immigrant agendas under the guise of moral righteousness.

While my research is deeply informed by Farris' work on femonationalism, it will depart from her neo-Marxist focus on economic factors and instead align more closely with the poststructuralist and deconstructivist approach used by Puar (2018) in her work on homonationalism. Since this dissertation aims to identify how femonationalism appropriates incidents of VAWG, it aligns more closely with Puar's aim to "understand the workings of symbolic and cultural systems", and deconstruct the cultural logics underpinning nationalist discourse (Möser, 2022: 1545). By extending femonationalism similarly to Puar's application of homonationalism, femonationalism's intersections of gender and nationalism make it a necessary framework to uncover how discussions of VAWG can be appropriated to reinforce nationalist narratives.

A key observation Farris (2017) emphasises is femonationalism's treatment of populism as a form of political rhetoric that it draws on (Farris, 2017: 58). This is a necessary acknowledgment to clarify the distinct yet overlapping nature of femonationalism and populism. With regards to the binaries that femonationalism perpetuates (victim and oppressor, us and the other), rhetorical devices that characterise populist discourse, like nomination strategies, predation, and topoi (Rheindorf et al., 2020: 623), are often adopted by femonationalist discourse. Recognising these discursive features will be crucial to this dissertation's CDA, as they offer insight into how femonationalist logics can construct meaning, assign blame or victimhood, and shape public perception.

2.2. Nationalism

Femonationalism's foundations lie in the nationalist project of defining and defending the "nation" through exclusionary and racialised narratives. Thus, while femonationalism provides the lens to analyse the appropriation of feminist themes in contexts of VAWG, nationalism serves as the broader ideology that underpins and contextualises these narratives. To fully grasp how femonationalist logics function, it is essential to contextualise the historically gendered and racialised foundations of nationalism, which underpin the contemporary selective use of gender and race to advance exclusionary agendas. Without this context, the mechanisms through which femonationalism appropriates and frames VAWG to align with nationalist narratives cannot be fully comprehended.

Taking Benedict Anderson's (1983) seminal definition, the nation is an 'imagined community' whose naturalisation demands a sense of necessity, immutability, and entitlement to loyalty

(Anderson, 1983, cited in Farris, 2017: 69). Central to this imagined community is the symbolic role of the female body in nationalist projects, as Professor Tamar Pitch underscores, stating:

> The state does not have a body, while the nation does. Which bodies and which body? The bodies of men who are asked to die to defend it and the bodies of women, on which its future depends. The body of the nation is exclusively female, just as, obviously, its mind is male (Pitch 2011, cited in Farris, 2017: 70).

Understanding the body of woman-as-nation is not a new concept; with figures like France's Marianne, Germany's Germania, and Britain's Britannia (Stirling, 2008: 16) - these female personifications and their bodies serve as allegories for nationhood itself. Represented as abundant, fertile, maternal, and sustaining, the "Motherland" nurtures and supports its dependents (Fanghanel, 2022: 139). However, this construction of the female body as both a vessel for the nation's purity and future (Banwell, 2020: 19), simultaneously positions it as a site of vulnerability. This places women's safety as a symbolic issue to the nation, making their bodies a focal point of nationalist actions against perceived threats - particularly from male 'others'. As Kapur (2018: 86, cited in Fanghanel, 2022: 140) observes, there is a resurgence of such Orientalist discourse that portrays the body of the "other" as a barbaric outsider, necessitating protection of "our", and occasionally "their" women. This narrative echoes Spivak's (1988) seminal concept of 'white men saving brown women from brown men', exemplified by US interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan in the early 2000s, which were largely justified as efforts to rescue and liberate Muslim women from their so-called 'barbaric' regimes (Shepherd, 2006: 26; Sjoberg, 2006: 903; Banwell, 2020: 113). These narratives that align with femonationalist imperatives underscore the inherently gendered nature of nationalism (Farris, 2012: 187). Gendered symbols and roles have historically played a crucial role in shaping national identity, whereby women's bodies have, and continue to serve as discursive battlegrounds for nationalist ideology. This historical intersection of gender, nationalism, and violence underpins why femonationalist logics are so effective - enabling politicians to position certain groups as threats and frame VAWG as a matter of national security.

Beyond its gendered nature, nationalism is also deeply racialised, shaped by imperialist narratives that often positioned women as victims of patriarchal violence to draw racialised boundaries between groups, and justify the domination of colonised populations. For example, French colonial policies in Algeria used the unveiling of Muslim women as a strategy to assert moral and cultural superiority, framing this as an emancipatory act from the so-called barbarity

of indigenous culture (Farris, 2017: 75). This discourse, which used perceived gender inequality as a marker of the inferiority of indigenous “others” (Macmaster, 2020), is instrumentalised in femonationalism and highlights the historically gendered and racist foundations of its logic. Similarly, the “Black as Rapist” trope, widely deployed in North America, served to uphold white hegemony by framing Black men as sexual threats to white women (Mann & Selva, 1976, cited in Farris: 2017: 74). This racialised discourse not only dehumanised Black men but also reinforced a narrative of white moral and cultural superiority. Such examples reflect how gendered, racialised nationalist discourse has historically co-opted VAWG to construct and maintain exclusionary national identities, with femonationalism drawing on these historical discourses to perpetuate and justify contemporary nationalist agendas.

2.3. Intersectionality

Intersectionality, a framework coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), is an essential concept in understanding how overlapping social identities - such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and migration status - interact to create unique and compounded experiences of oppression or privilege. Despite being lauded as one of the most significant innovations in recent feminist literature (Dhawan & Castro Varela, 2023: 1), intersectionality has received a fair amount of criticism - amongst them being one from Puar (2018). Puar’s aforementioned poststructuralist and deconstructivist approach critiques intersectionality for relying on fixed identity categories (Dhawan & Castro Varela, 2023: 13), which she argues risks ossifying these categories and limiting the ability to engage with the fluid and chaotic nature of social forces (Dhawan & Castro Varela, 2023: 85). Despite critiques, intersectionality remains central to this study. By accounting for the multiple social identities of both victims and perpetrators, it allows identification of how femonationalist logics emerge, and how politicians may selectively emphasise or downplay identity factors to engage with femonationalist logics.

The interaction of these three theories will be paramount to identifying and understanding how femonationalist logics operate in the parliamentary discourse of VAWG. Femonationalism provides the lens for identifying the appropriation of feminist ideals to further nationalist agendas; nationalism contextualises the narratives that enable femonationalism to resonate effectively; and intersectionality reveals how femonationalist logics emerge and vary in their application.

3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the dissertation's qualitative methodological framework, followed by an explanation of how data sources were collected and why specific case studies were chosen. Then, with its focus on how power relations are reproduced through discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is justified as the methodology best suited to reveal how femonationalist logics operate in the British parliamentary discourse of VAWG to reinforce certain hierarchies, and reproduce exclusionary narratives.

3.1. Data Sources and Collection

This dissertation will analyse primary data for research, and will draw from British parliamentary debates regarding the three case studies. This data is available upon request. Speeches from both the House of Commons and House of Lords were analysed, as the House of Lords plays a crucial role in scrutinising and revising bills passed by the Commons - offering diverse perspectives that enrich Commons discourse. Although we might expect femonationalist logics to emerge first in less formal contexts such as social media (Fernandes et al., 2025: 3), a focus on parliamentary debates was chosen to analyse a key site of political discourse that directly shapes narratives and policy responses to VAWG. Parliamentary debates were sourced from TheyWorkForYou - a user-friendly, non-partisan database that offers accessible records of British parliamentarians' speeches, actions, and votes. Its efficient filtering supports a systematic, replicable research process. Any secondary data used for analysis will derive from existing studies.

Relevant speeches were identified by systematically searching TheyWorkForYou using the victims' names, limited to within a year of their deaths. This timeframe ensured a manageable and comparable dataset, particularly given the volume of debate following the Everard case. Only speeches explicitly naming the victims were included to maintain focus and feasibility. While this may exclude some relevant discussions - especially where names were not explicitly mentioned to potentially sidestep controversy - it allows for a structured approach. While a full year has not passed since the Southport case, the extensive discourse over the past eight months offers sufficient material for analysis.

All parliamentary speeches were copied into separate Excel spreadsheets for each case and organised by date, debate, speaker, political affiliation, and key themes. Each case generated a

varying number of relevant mentions - over 500 in the Everard case alone - making it impractical to conduct CDA on every speech. Thus, a systematic sampling method was employed: 30 speeches per case were selected for in-depth analysis. Speeches were selected based on thematic relevance and representation across political parties, gender, and parliamentary roles, to reflect a wide range of perspectives and discursive strategies. Priority was given to speeches exhibiting femonationalist logics - such as through moral framing of victims and perpetrators, appeals to cultural divides, and references to policy proposals. Once the sample was finalised, each set of 30 speeches underwent two readings:

1. Initial readings involved identification and recording of dominant themes, recurring phrases, and rhetorical patterns specific to each case.

2. Second readings were carried out with CDA in mind, to explore deeper ideological meanings, language strategies, and narrative construction within the texts.

To support understanding the key findings and discussions regarding each case, speeches were analysed using Atlas.ti - a qualitative data analysis software. A word cloud of the 100 most frequently occurring terms in the entire dataset of each case study was generated to highlight prominent linguistic patterns. This visualisation helped reveal dominant rhetoric, discussions, and repeated associations (e.g. “safety”, “violence”, “women”). As Castleberry and Nolan (2018: 809) note, such software uses “linguistic and semantic algorithms to detect sequencing and co-occurring phrasing in a reliable and systematic manner”, aiding data organisation. However, they also emphasise, “the researcher’s mind is the power behind analysis”, and thus the analytical process will be conducted independently using CDA as the primary methodology.

3.2. Critical Discourse Analysis

Emerging in the late 1990s, CDA critically examines the “relationship between language, ideology, power and social structure” (Catalano & Waugh, 2020: 1). CDA’s focus on how language constructs meaning and reinforces power relations makes it well-suited to identify femonationalist logics and examine how they operate. By uncovering the ideological functions of language in political discourse, CDA enables analysis of how gendered violence is framed to justify exclusionary agendas. As CDA offers a broad scope of analysis which sees it “lack set ways of conducting analysis” (Baker, 2012 cited in Catalano & Waugh, 2020: 163), this dissertation will adopt Fairclough’s three-dimensional model (1989, 2013) of analysis to ensure

consistency and focus. Fairclough's model consists of three interrelated levels of analysis. Firstly, textual analysis examines the structure and content of language, focusing on how linguistic choices - like vocabulary, grammar, and rhetorical devices - encode ideology and reproduce power relations. Secondly, discursive analysis considers how discourse is produced and received, paying particular attention to how politicians use language to align VAWG with nationalist narratives, often through moralising or emotionally charged appeals. Thirdly, social analysis situates the discourse within its broader socio-political context, exploring how contemporary femonationalist logics gain traction by reproducing and adapting historical nationalist narratives (Fairclough, 1989, cited in Janks, 1997: 329).

3.3. Selection of Cases

Three case studies were selected, comprising five murders: those of Sarah Everard (2021), Sabina Nessa (2021), and Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe, and Alice da Silva Aguiar (2024). These cases were chosen as each:

1. Represents an instance of VAWG in Britain that received significant political and media attention, amplifying the political salience whereby politicians were more likely to engage directly in discussions pertaining to national identity, immigration, and race.

2. Presents unique circumstances involving victims and perpetrators from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This diversity permits examination of how politicians may have strategically leveraged the differing social identities involved in each case, thereby using femonationalist logics in distinct ways to advance exclusionary nationalist narratives.

While these high-profile cases may not capture the full spectrum of VAWG politicisation, they were selected for their visibility and the likelihood of prompting explicit political engagement with femonationalist logics. Although the Southport mass murder may elicit distinct responses due to its scale and age of the victims, comparing it with the individual cases of Sarah Everard and Sabina Nessa will allow the consideration of whether femonationalist logics operate differently across both individual and collective instances of VAWG. Together, these cases provide rich, varied material for understanding how femonationalist logics operate across different social contexts and circumstances. They enable a nuanced exploration of how VAWG is politicised, and may illustrate how certain elements of each case may have been emphasised or downplayed to strengthen the impact of femonationalist logics.

To conclude this chapter, the outlined methodology - including primary data collection and organisation, Atlas.ti for identifying key themes, and Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model - establishes a comprehensive framework for addressing the central research question: *How do femonationalist logics operate in British parliamentary discourse on violence against women and girls?* By examining how power relations and national identities are shaped through discourse, this approach will uncover how parliamentary discourses perpetuate exclusionary narratives using femonationalist logics.

4. The Murder of Sarah Everard

This chapter introduces the first case study: the murder of Sarah Everard. It presents key themes and findings from the CDA of parliamentary discourse, drawing on a word cloud of the 100 most frequently occurring words across the 507 parliamentary references to her case. The findings examine three central themes: policing and the role of the state in protecting women, the personalisation and symbolic framing of Everard's death, and the discursive construction of Couzens' identity.

4.1. Case Study Introduction

Sarah Everard, a 33-year-old marketing executive, was last seen walking home through Clapham Common on March 3, 2021. She was reported missing by her boyfriend when she failed to meet him the next day. It was later discovered that, upon being apprehended for violating Britain's Covid-19 guidelines (Gill, 2024: 928), off-duty Metropolitan Police (MET) officer Wayne Couzens had kidnapped, raped, and murdered Everard. In Kent, her burnt remains were found inside a refrigerator and were only identifiable through dental records (Gill, 2024: 928). Everard's murder ignited widespread public and political debate about the police's role in protecting women, as well as the prevalence of police-perpetrated violence against women (Kilby, 2023: 1). Couzens exploited his authority as a police officer to detain Everard under the pretense of enforcing COVID-19 regulations, and utilised his police-issued handcuffs and belt to facilitate the subsequent acts of violence (Cunningham, 2024: 3). The MET, and British police culture more broadly, faced intense scrutiny following Everard's murder. Failures to investigate multiple indecent exposure allegations against Couzens allowed him to remain in service (Sinclair, 2021, in Bürger et al., 2023: 237), and, during the search for Everard, one officer was suspended for sharing inappropriate graphics, while five others were investigated for exchanging offensive material with Couzens prior to the murder (Everad, 2021, in Bürger et al., 2023: 237). Furthermore, the use of force to disperse crowds at Everard's vigil in Clapham Common owing to UK Covid-19 guidelines was widely condemned. Media footage of the vigil showed male police officers forcibly moving and arresting women who were commemorating another woman murdered by a male police officer (Grierson, 2022 cited in Kilby, 2023: 1).

Intersectional considerations must take into account the racialised and classed identity of Everard as a young, White, middle-upper class woman. As Kilby (2023: 2) notes, "the decision to include a discussion of the Sarah Everard case in this article is, in part, … her identity as a

White woman". Couzens' identity as a White police officer - a 'native' figure of the law - is also an interesting element to consider whether institutional power and privilege can shield perpetrators from scrutiny and accountability. Everard's and Couzens' identities positioned this case as one that both reinforced societal narratives of ideal victimhood, and exposed institutional failures.

4.2. Key Findings

This section discusses key findings regarding how Everard's case was discursively framed in parliament. It should be noted that Everard's death garnered the highest number of mentions in the year following her murder, significantly surpassing the other two case studies - underscoring its national significance.

Figure 1: Word cloud of the 100 most frequently occurring words in parliamentary discourse of Everard's murder.

Policing and the State's Role in Protecting Women

The word cloud highlights the prominence of terms like police, officer, law, legislation, and government, reflecting a strong state-centred framing. Discourse condemned the MET for failing to vet him, and underscored the "wider issues of [misogynistic] culture in the Met and elsewhere in policing". Such discussions of "disgraceful police action" gave way to a large focus on institutional solutions, particularly, wide-ranging police "reforms…to ensure this never happens again". This emphasis on institutional reforms to tackle misogyny in male-dominated institutions overshadowed discussions of socio-economic inequalities - despite their known links to VAWG (True, 2012). Despite Couzens' position as a policeman, proposed solutions seemed contradictory in their centering on stronger state intervention through legal reform and increased policing. Harriet Harman, for instance, described the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill as a chance for the government to "start protecting" women, reinforcing perceptions of the state as responsible in protecting its women, and framing gendered violence as a matter of national security.

Personalising the Tragedy

The discourse tended to depict Everard using universalising, emotive rhetoric that framed her as someone all women could see themselves in. Several Members of Parliament (MPs), such as Maria Miller (2021, Debate on International Women's Day, HOC), spoke of her death as "hitting close to home". Everard's death was heavily personalised and repeatedly portrayed as someone who was "just walking home", having taken every possible precaution - she was described as "doing everything she could to protect herself", from wearing "bright clothes and running shoes" to deliberately choosing routes "through well-lit streets". Such focus on the specifics of her death rendered it exceptionally personal, whereby her murder was elevated from a personal tragedy, to a national one.

Constructing the Perpetrator

In discussions of Couzens, his identity as both a man and a police officer was heavily emphasised, while his whiteness remained largely unacknowledged - rendering race an invisible and irrelevant factor in the public construction of his violence. With his whiteness absent from discussion, Couzens' consumption and obsession "with violent, extreme pornographic websites" became a focal point for rationalising the roots of his misogyny. Thus rather than race, religion, or socio-economic inequalities, Couzens' violence was constructed as stemming from widespread misogyny affecting men across society. Many politicians echoed the sentiment that

while “not all men” committed VAWG, all men had the responsibility to challenge sexism and misogyny. With pornography primarily framed in the discourse as a key driver of misogyny that normalised VAWG, there were repeated calls for stricter regulations on pornography in line with the previously mentioned broader emphasis on legal and institutional reforms - reinforcing a state-centred approach to tackling VAWG.

5. The Murder of Sabina Nessa

This chapter introduces the second case study: the murder of Sabina Nessa. The CDA reveals key patterns in how her case was constructed in parliament - through broader discussions around VAWG, her symbolic pairing with Everard, the erasure of her racial and religious identity, and the omission of her perpetrator - Koci Selamaj.

5.1. Case Study Introduction

Months after Everard's murder, 28-year-old primary school teacher Sabina Nessa was killed on September 17th, 2021 in a south-east London park by 36-year-old Koci Selamaj (Bleakley, 2023: 846). Although there was evidence that Selamaj had meticulously planned to carry out a killing, Nessa - like Everard - was targeted at random (Drummond, 2022). Selamaj waited for over half an hour before attacking Nessa - who had previously expressed concerns about walking through the park alone after dark (Drummond, 2022). Selamaj struck her more than 34 times on the head with a metal traffic triangle before strangling her - either of which could have killed her (BBC News, 2022). Deemed a sexually motivated attack despite the absence of 'positive' evidence of sexual assault, Nessa's body was found without her tights and skirt on (Drummond, 2022). Selamaj was arrested on September 26th at his home in Eastbourne, East Sussex. During court proceedings, it emerged that he had previously been violent towards his ex-partner, and that he had attempted to contact her for sex just two hours before murdering Nessa (Drummond, 2022). Selamaj pleaded guilty to the murder, though he refused to appear at the Old Bailey to receive his life sentence and offered no explanation, merely accepting "that he did it" (BBC News, 2022). In contrast to Couzens, Selamaj's swift admission allowed for a quicker conviction, leaving little room for public doubt or speculation. As a result, the possibility for himpathy - a phenomenon in which "the flow of sympathy shifts away from female victims toward their male victimisers" (Mann, 2017: 23, cited in Bleakley, 2023: 852) - was significantly diminished.

While vigils were held in Kidbrooke, Newham, Hackney, Bristol, and Brighton, Nessa's murder received significantly less media coverage than Everard's (Bleakley, 2023: 845). This disparity has even prompted Nessa's family to publicly question whether identity politics influenced the level of attention her case received (Drummond, 2022). Speaking to the BBC's Today Programme, Nessa's sister drew direct comparisons between the two murders - both of which occurred under similar circumstances. She remarked, "She (Sabina) didn't get the front pages on some of the papers, and in Sarah Everard's case she did. I think it's just down to our

ethnicity" (Sky News, 2022). Nessa was a British woman of Bangladeshi Muslim heritage, while Selamaj was an Albanian migrant who had arrived in the UK around seven years earlier and was working as a refuse collector at the time (Drummond, 2022).

5.2. Key Findings

Nessa's death only generated 38 relevant mentions in Parliament the year following her murder, compared to Everard's 507 mentions. While the word cloud highlights the frequency with which Everard's name was mentioned alongside Nessa's, it fails to capture that Nessa's name was primarily invoked in passing, often alongside other victims of VAWG, like Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman.

Figure 2: Word cloud of the 100 most frequently occurring words in parliamentary discourse of Nessa's murder.

VAWG in Britain

References to Nessa's murder were typically embedded into general calls for the government to "do better" in addressing the "epidemic of VAWG" in Britain. Debates mentioning Nessa's case overwhelmingly stressed the need to strengthen existing legislation, specifically calling to criminalise curb crawling. While several MPs emphasised the millions already invested in VAWG prevention and acknowledged the government's "staggering failures" in protecting its women and girls - their proposed solutions continued to centre state-solutions - calling for VAWG to be treated "with the same priority as counter-terrorism". Such framing underscores a securitised approach to VAWG that functions to legitimise the expansion of state powers.

Association with Everard's Murder

To underscore the pervasiveness of VAWG in the UK, Nessa's case was often referenced in passing alongside other victims of VAWG - most notably Sarah Everard - a rhetorical device to stress the scale of the VAWG "epidemic". Of the 30 speeches selected for CDA, 24 referenced Nessa's murder in the same breath as Everard's, where Nessa's murder was rarely the central focus of any given speech. Such frequent pairing is indicative of how Nessa's case was framed within a broader, well-established narrative of the state's responsibility to tackle VAWG. None of the speeches provided much detail into the circumstances of Nessa's murder, where her name was often referenced symbolically to evoke broader concern about, and rally support for, legislation addressing VAWG.

Limited References to Nessa's Ethnic Identity

As Nessa's murder was primarily mentioned alongside other victims of gendered violence, there was little mention of her South Asian ethnicity. Of the speeches selected for CDA, only four mentioned Nessa's ethnic minority background. Two speeches addressed the barriers faced by Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women, particularly in seeking support during the pandemic, where they were disproportionately affected by family abuse and enforced servitude. These MPs emphasised the compounded stigma, discrimination, and risk of criminalisation that BME women face as key reasons preventing them from accessing safety and support. Another speech raised concerns about the lack of attention given to ethnic minority communities, questioning what the government was doing for those who felt VAWG in and amongst their communities was neglected in comparison to others. The fourth speaker used Nessa's case to highlight the urgent need to rebuild trust between BME communities and the police. While a

small number of speeches acknowledged the distinct vulnerabilities faced by BME women, none engaged specifically with Nessa's ethnic or religious identity.

Constructing the Perpetrator

Selamaj's name was only mentioned once in the speeches collected referencing Nessa's murder. This is perhaps unsurprising, considering how rarely Nessa's case was discussed in comparison to Everard's. The sole mention of Selamaj was in the context of his "cowardly" refusal to be present when Nessa's family delivered their victim impact statement. In the dataset, his identity was thus irrelevant in shaping the parliamentary discourse surrounding the case.

6. The Murders of Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe, and Alice da Silva Aguiar

This chapter introduces the third case study: the Southport Murders, which comprises the deaths of Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe, and Alice da Silva Aguiar. The CDA identifies key discursive patterns, including the securitisation of the attack through counter-terror and national security rhetoric, the racialisation of the perpetrator, and the construction of state failure around Prevent and knife crime regulation.

6.1. Case Study Introduction

On July 29th, 2024, a Taylor Swift-themed dance class in Southport became the scene of a horrific mass stabbing, claiming the lives of Bebe King, six, Elsie Dot Stancombe, seven, and Alice da Silva Aguiar, nine, (Halliday, 2025b). Axel Rudakubana was 17-years old when he committed the murders, and received a 52 year sentence in January 2025 (Ferguson, 2025). Given the UK's Court of Contempt Act 1981, which strictly limits the publication of information that could prejudice a fair trial, and the fact that Rudakubana was a minor at the time of the crime (Halliday, 2025a), only limited details about his identity were initially made public. Misinformation regarding Rudakubana's identity quickly spread online through social media platforms by far-right figures like Andrew Tate and Tommy Robinson (Woode, 2025: 47). Politicians, including Nigel Farage, fuelled further public curiosity by questioning Rudakubana's identity, despite Chief Constable Serena Kennedy confirming only six hours after the attack that Rudakubana was born in Cardiff and lived in Lancashire (Woode, 2025: 48). Rumors claiming Rudakubana was a Muslim asylum seeker and on an MI6 watchlist fueled xenophobic and islamophobic sentiment that manifested in racist 'anti-immigration' riots (Woode, 2025): 47. These spread throughout much of Britain and to Belfast in Northern Ireland, with rioters targeting mosques and hotels believed to be housing asylum seekers (Choonara, 2024: 3).

Despite later revelations that Rudakubana was the son of Rwandan immigrants who had fled the genocide (Sandford et al., 2025), riots continued into early September 2024. Unrest was organised in August outside immigration-related offices, however these were quickly quelled when met by large counter protests (Choonara, 2024: 6). Thus, public discourse surrounding the deaths of the three young girls quickly became entangled with debates on immigration, islamophobia, and VAWG. Subsequent revelations intensified public scrutiny as it was announced Rudakubana was found to have produced the biological toxin ricin and possessed an al-Qaeda terrorist manual (Halliday, 2025a), sparking debate over whether the attack should

be classified an act of terrorism. Moreover, the revelation that authorities had been aware of Rudakubana's antisocial behavior - having been referred to Prevent (the UK's anti-radicalisation program) three times prior and having previously brought a knife to school (Sandford et al., 2025) - triggered widespread outrage that fuelled criticism of institutional failure and accusations of potential cover-ups (Halliday, 2025a).

6.2. Key Findings

Despite not being a full year since the murders, as of March 4th 2025, 137 relevant parliamentary mentions to the Southport stabbings were generated. This volume of discourse provides a substantial dataset from which key patterns can be drawn, and femonationalist logics can be analysed.

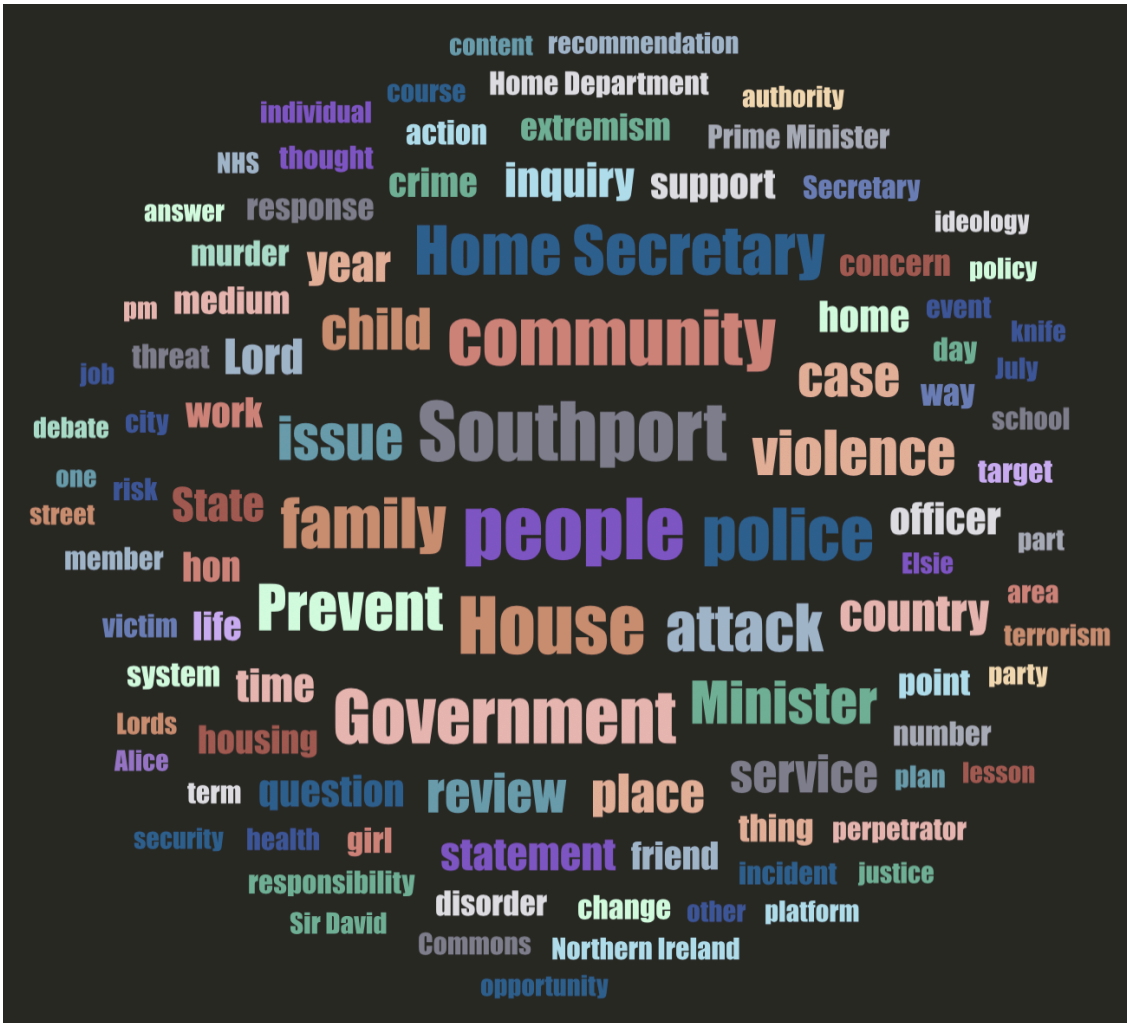

Figure 3: Word cloud of the 100 most frequently occurring words in parliamentary discourse of the Southport murders.

Gendered Violence as a Security Threat

Parliamentary discourse around the Southport stabbings adopted a markedly securitised framing, more so than in the previous case studies. Repeated references to “terrorism”, “extremism”, and the involvement of counter-terror units positioned the attack as a threat to national security rather than an instance of gendered violence. While this securitised framing can be attributed to the scale of the attack, this shift in framing functions discursively to foreground state security concerns while marginalising structural critiques of misogyny and VAWG.

Rudakubana’s Racialisation

Parliamentary discourse surrounding Southport revealed a pronounced racialised framing, even before details of Rudakubana’s identity were officially released. References and calls to end the “unchecked, unpoliced and illegal migration” supposedly at the root of the national riots seen, serve as topoi of threat - enabling a discursive shift from individual culpability to systemic suspicion of racialised and migrant communities. This pre-emptive racialisation aligns with the “us vs. them” binary central to femonationalist discourse, reinforcing the idea that violence is culturally imported rather than domestically produced. Several politicians also expressed concern over the delay in disclosing Rudakubana’s identity - particularly his possession of an Al-Qaeda training manual - framing the lack of information as contributing to the public unrest.

Failure of the Prevent Programme

The Prevent programme emerged as a central theme in discussions of state failure, with MPs repeatedly questioning how Rudakubana had evaded intervention despite being referred to the programme and whose danger was knownst to authorities. Rather than framed as a consequence of chronic underfunding or systemic neglect, the programme’s shortcomings were understood as caused by issues of bureaucratic dysfunction. As such, Prevent was discussed as a tool that simply had not been robustly implemented, rather than one with inherently flawed measures and mechanisms - criticisms frequently levied against it (Awan, 2012: 1177). This framing served to maintain faith in state institutions while reaffirming their authority to manage cultural threat, avoiding interrogation of the broader systemic conditions that enable radicalisation or VAWG.

Knife Crime and Regulatory Shortcomings

Closely connected to discussions of state failure was the issue of knife crime in Britain, and the ease with which Rudakubana was able to acquire the weapon he used online. Despite being underage and having a prior conviction for violent assault, he was able to purchase a knife from Amazon without difficulty. Legislative shortcomings like this were frequently referred to as a “disgrace”, calling for immediate legal reforms to address the loophole. The focus on legislative shortcomings reduces VAWG to an issue of state oversight, reinforcing the notion that institutional reform - rather than addressing the broader conditions enabling male violence - remains an appropriate response.

7. Analysis

Upon comparing key findings, it became increasingly clear that strategic silences were central to how femonationalist logics operate in British parliamentary discourse on VAWG. Given that parliamentary debates are officially recorded, politicians understandably filter their remarks to avoid overtly controversial or condemnable language. Yet, through strategic silences - the selective omission of key details - politicians are able to manipulate how cases are understood and discussed in parliament and beyond. These silences are particularly striking upon comparison, enabling politicians to highlight specific victims or perpetrators in ways that align with nationalistic and security-driven agendas in parliamentary discourse. Femonationalist logics were identified through the selective 'exceptionalisation' of certain victims, the framing of VAWG as either a societal or cultural issue based on the perpetrator's racialised identity, and the reaffirmation of the state as the primary guarantor of women's safety.

7.1. Selective Exceptionalism of Cases

A clear disparity was quickly evident in parliamentary discourse on the murders of Sarah Everard and Sabina Nessa. While both women were killed in public spaces, in London, in 2021, under comparable circumstances; the magnitude and quality of political attention they received was markedly diverged. The Southport case will not be discussed in this section, as the presence of multiple young victims, and the riots that followed, render its 'exceptionalisation' less indicative of the selective rhetoric this analysis seeks to interrogate. Everard's murder was 'exceptionalised' in two key ways: through the frequency of parliamentary references, and through the nature of the discourse. This selective recognition of victims is not a neutral phenomenon; rather, it constitutes a political process that, while often subtle or unintentional, reflects the operation of femonationalist logics. The elevated attention of certain victims over others constitutes an implicit process of mourning that reproduces a racialised and gendered moral order where only certain lives are imagined as worthy of acknowledgement, grief, and protection (Butler, 2008: 20 - 21). This process ultimately reinforces racialised hierarchies that shape understandings of national belonging.

Everard's murder was rapidly framed as a national tragedy, garnering 507 parliamentary references and becoming the focal point of numerous speeches. In contrast, Nessa's murder was referenced only 36 times, with over two-thirds of these mentions listing her name alongside others - lists frequently headed by Everard's name (further reinforcing Everard's symbolic

status). This disparity suggests a hierarchy of victimhood, wherein some lives are rendered more emotionally resonant and politically significant. While the perpetrator's identity significantly shapes whether an act of violence is perceived as exceptional - as evidenced by the fact that public comments doubting Couzens' guilt were 3.5 times higher than those doubting Selamaj's (Bleakley, 2023: 846), suggesting that Couzens' status as a police officer may have 'exceptionalised' Everard's case - this alone does not account for the divergent symbolic value ascribed to the victims. This is particularly striking given the analogous contexts of Everard's and Nessa's murders. It is worth considering whether political responses to Nessa's death would have been more prominent had she been white. By femonationalist logics, the murder of a white woman by a migrant perpetrator would likely have attracted greater political attention, offering a clearer opportunity to frame gendered violence as culturally imported and external to the national self - hereby reinforcing dominant nationalist narratives under the guise of protecting women. This dynamic aligns with the literature on Missing White Woman Syndrome (MWWS), where white, middle-class women are disproportionately represented in political and media discourse surrounding violence and disappearance (Gilchrist, 2010; Sommers, 2016; Stillman, 2007). Bonilla-Silva's (2010) concept of racial grammar - the implicit norms that sustain white supremacy (Sommers, 2017: 287), provides further analytical depth. These norms construct white victims as universally relatable and morally compelling, while racialised victims are rendered invisible or conditionally grievable. As applied here, MWWS helps explain why Everard's identity may have lent itself to her amplified political salience relative to Nessa's.

The rhetoric surrounding both cases were shaped by femonationalist logics. Everard was universalised in parliament - described as a woman who could have been "any one of us", whose death left women "shaken to their core", and, as noted by then-Shadow Home Office Minister Jess Phillips, a name "we have all prayed" would not join the annual list of women killed by men. Nessa's death was contrastingly depersonalised. None of the references in her dataset acknowledged her Bengali-Muslim background. Instead, the focus was primarily on her role as a primary school teacher, highlighted four times - a position traditionally perceived as feminised (Skelton, 2002: 88) and respectable (Everton et al., 2007: 248). This selective framing reflects a key mechanism of femonationalist logic: muting aspects of identity that are deemed politically inconvenient. In Nessa's case, her racial and religious background disrupted the construction of a race-neutral, depoliticised victimhood. Its omission signals a broader reluctance to confront the intersecting structural forces - such as racism and Islamophobia - that shape violence against BME women (Gill, 2004: 466). Viewed through a femonationalist lens, the contrasting

parliamentary responses to Everard and Nessa - both in terms of frequency and rhetoric - reveal the racialised politics of grievable subjecthood in Britain. While this disparity may not always reflect conscious bias, it nonetheless points to a patterned process of selective visibility - one that highlights how femonationalist logics operate across these cases not only through overt discursive claims, but through patterns of omission and emphasis. These rhetorical practices help, albeit implicitly, construct a national imaginary in which only certain bodies are rendered visible, mournable, and thus fully of the nation, while others are quietly relegated to its margins.

7.2. VAWG - A Societal or Cultural Issue?

Across the three case studies, a consistent pattern emerged in how the identity of the perpetrator shaped parliamentary discourse around acts of VAWG. While explicit references to race, religion, or immigration status were rare, these silences were not neutral. Instead, they reflect a rhetorical strategy aligned with femonationalist logics - one that selectively emphasises or obscures perpetrator identity. As Camacho (2021: 95), drawing on Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde (1998: 124), notes, such strategies enable securitising logics in which perceived threats to identity contribute to constructing a binary between “us” and “them”. This dichotomy reinforces nationalist narratives by positioning the state as protector of the in-group against culturally ‘deviant’ outsiders, thereby justifying exclusionary and securitised policies.

In Everard’s case, political discourse overwhelmingly centred on Couzens’ institutional identity as a police officer. His whiteness was rendered invisible - unmarked and thus normative. Rather than racialising his violence, MPs attributed it to systemic misogyny within the police, calling for institutional reform, stricter policing, and safeguards against abuse of authority. Understood through femonationalism, the normative nature of Couzens’ whiteness likely enabled the framing of his misogyny as a broader societal issue, rather than one rooted in cultural pathologisation. By contrast, Selamaj’s migrant status - though prominent in media coverage and often entangled with xenophobic narratives (Thorburn, 2021, cited in Bleakley, 2023: 846) - was mentioned only once in that dataset - with his ethnicity and immigration background entirely omitted. This silence raises a key question: why was his identity not racialised within parliamentary discourse, especially when ‘othered’ perpetrators often anchor securitised rhetoric? One explanation lies in Selamaj’s European origin. As Farris (2017: 5) notes, femonationalism disproportionately targets Muslim and non-white migrants. Morrison (2019, cited in Bleakley, 2023: 848) observes that EU migrants, though framed as criminal threats, are not securitised in the same way as Muslim migrants. The absence of racial or cultural labelling is

indicative of a selective silence that suggests a political discomfort in deploying securitised narratives when the perpetrator's racialised identity does not align with dominant nationalist fears - namely the Islamophobic archetype of the Muslim male aggressor that femonationalism relies upon. Nessa's own Bengali-Muslim identity was likewise erased in parliamentary discourse - a rhetorical silence that, as aforementioned, obscures the structural vulnerabilities she may have faced. Given both Nessa and Selamaj's identities do not fit neatly within the femonationalist mould, this may explain the relative depersonalisation of both figures in parliamentary discourse. The Southport case, however, demonstrates how quickly racialisation can trigger securitisation - a process defined by the framing of issues within security-centric paradigms of control and defense (Bourbeau, 2015: 395, cited in Camacho, 2021: 94). Despite initial uncertainty around the attacker's identity, Rudakubana's presumed migrant and religious background was rapidly centred in political debate. As the mass nature of his violence prompted discussion around public safety, MPs framed the incident in terms of national security, not gendered violence. Instead, assumptions about Rudakubana's immigration status and religion permeated both political and media narratives, shifting focus from misogyny to cultural deviance. The discourse aligned with counter-extremism frameworks like Prevent, and there was a notable uptick in references to managing both legal and illegal immigration - a rhetorical almost entirely absent from discussions of Everard or Nessa.

This underscores how when perpetrators are racialised as non-white, migrant, or Muslim, VAWG is more easily framed not as a societal issue but as a culturally external threat - a pathology of the 'other'. Despite limited initial information, the Southport murders reflected the highest volume of securitised language - terms such as "terrorism", "radicalisation", and "extremism". The later revelation that Rudakubana possessed an Al-Qaeda training manual only entrenched the existing racialised security narrative, overshadowing critical discussions about how his act of violence intersected with root causes of radicalisation - like alienation and mental health (Lawlor, 2024: 228 - 229). This disparity highlights how femonationalist rhetoric operates: violence by racialised men is cast as rooted in cultural deviance, while the violence of white perpetrators is treated as a symptom of broader societal dysfunction. Crucially, femonationalist logics can be identified to operate through strategic silences, comparatively used across the cases to de-racialise white violence, depoliticise racialised victimhood, or reframe gendered violence as cultural deviance. In each instance, what was left unsaid played a crucial role in shaping who was protected, who was securitised, and who was forgotten. These rhetorical patterns expose a racialised hierarchy of political utility: some acts of VAWG are national tragedies reflecting

patriarchal failings; others are pathologised as culturally alien and incompatible with British values.

7.3. The State's Centrality

Across all three case studies parliamentary discourse consistently positioned the state as the central guarantor of women's safety, framing solutions to VAWG within its authority. This builds on the earlier analysis of how gendered violence is framed as either a societal or cultural issue depending on the perpetrator's racialisation, revealing a more indirect operation of femonationalist logics. Here, gendered violence is constructed as a problem rooted in "other" cultures - external to the nation - thereby obscuring the structural inequalities and conditions that produce such violence within Britain itself. As such, the state not only evades scrutiny but reasserts its moral authority, casting itself as the rightful protector of its women. This reinforces nationalist narratives in which the state's power is legitimised through its ability to safeguard its women from culturally 'foreign' threats, further entrenching a gendered and racialised logic of protection and nationalism. In Everard's case, parliamentary responses focused on internal reforms: enhanced police vetting, legislative amendments, and increased surveillance. While these proposals appeared progressive, they ultimately re-centred trust in the very institutions that failed to protect her. With the Southport case, Rudakubana's identity triggered heightened discussions of racialised securitising practices like immigration control and counter-terror measures (Choudhury, 2023). The former justified institutional reform; the latter legitimised the expansion of carceral and border regimes. In both instances, the state avoided self-reflexivity, displacing the root causes of violence onto either procedural lapses or external threats.

These divergent responses reveal how state-centred solutions are enabled and shaped by strategic silences on the structural inequalities driving VAWG. Decades of feminist research has shows how structural conditions like economic precarity, housing insecurity, institutional racism, and systemic inequality, make women more vulnerable to, and less likely to seek help for, sexual and gender-based violence (Aldridge, 2013; Nixon & Humphreys, 2010; Strid et al., 2013). Thus, tackling such conditions are not peripheral but foundational to addressing VAWG. As resources to tackle VAWG are often undermined by simultaneous state-led actions to defund essential services - like shelters, welfare programmes, and migrant support networks - that could empower survivors (Aldridge, 2013: 1831), reforms become little more than symbolic gestures, preserving the state's legitimacy without addressing the underlying issues. Strategic silences in this discourse regarding the structural drivers of VAWG underscore the operation of

femonationalist logics by framing gendered violence as an issue that can be solved through state-centric, securitised measures. This approach reinforces a gendered and racialised logic of protection, positioning the state as the ultimate protector of women, while simultaneously enabling exclusionary policies that disproportionately target racialised groups and prioritise punitive measures over meaningful, systemic change to VAWG.

Femonationalism is dangerous. By obscuring the root drivers of VAWG and working to justify exclusionary border policies, femonationalist logics perpetuate harmful racialised narratives and maintain systemic inequalities under the guise of feminist protection. The exceptional framing of certain (often white) victims that fit the national imaginary, the securitisation of discourse around racialised perpetrators, and the emphasis on state-led interventions against VAWG collectively construct gendered violence as something that originates outside British borders. This not only diverts attention from the violence embedded within Britain, but also sustains gendered and racialised nationalist logics.

8. Conclusion

This dissertation's central aim was to examine how femonationalist logics operate in British parliamentary discourse on VAWG. Broadly, this dissertation conducted a comparative analysis of parliamentary discourse around three fatal cases of VAWG to examine how femonationalist logics operate intersectionally to reinforce nationalist narratives in post-Brexit Britain. Specifically, the dissertation had two main objectives, first, to examine how femonationalist logics operate in discussions of gendered violence to construct national identity, or reinforce other nationalist narratives; second, to explore how the operation of femonationalist logics is shaped by the intersectional identities of both victims and perpetrators.

To achieve these aims, Chapter Two established a theoretical framework integrating femonationalism, nationalism, and intersectionality. This enabled an analysis of how feminist themes are appropriated for nationalist purposes and how the intersectional identities of victims and perpetrators shape the operation of femonationalist logics. Chapter Three outlined the methodological approach, justifying the use of CDA and detailing the selected data and case studies. Chapters Four to Six presented case-specific findings, using Atlas.ti word clouds to visualise dominant themes in parliamentary discourse. Chapter Seven developed these findings through comparative analysis. In doing so, and answering the goals set out in chapter one, this dissertation adds value through discovering that:

1. Upon comparative analysis, selective silences emerge as a key rhetorical tool in parliamentary discourse through which femonationalist logics subtly operate.

2. Femonationalist logics operate through racialised political mourning, wherein certain victims - often white women - are elevated as "national tragedies", while others are rendered invisible. This selectivity reinforces nationalist narratives grounded in exclusion, and reproduces hierarchies of 'ideal victimhood' that construct understandings of national identity.

3. Femonationalist logics are shaped by intersectional dynamics. Intersectional considerations produce divergent narratives of sympathy, blame, or securitisation, and reinforce binary constructions of "us" versus "them" within parliamentary discourse - legitimising calls for immigration control and surveillance under the guise of protection.

4. Across all three cases, parliamentary discourse is dominated by state-centred solutions. These responses reflect a core operation of femonationalist logics: the co-option of feminist concerns to legitimise state authority and nationalist aims. By positioning the state as the remedy to VAWG, such discourse obscures its role in sustaining the structural inequalities that enable VAWG.

These findings offer a significant contribution to femonationalism literature by revealing how, in post-Brexit Britain, discourse on VAWG can subtly reinforce nationalist narratives. Crucially, this dissertation introduces strategic silences as a central rhetorical device, used to selectively omit details to construct narratives that depict VAWG either as isolated manifestations of societal misogyny, or as cultural pathologies imported from racialised 'others'. These omissions enable political actors to align with nationalist narratives, subtly reinforcing exclusionary logics without necessarily explicitly articulating them. Additionally, such framings deflect attention from the structural drivers of VAWG, obscuring the systemic misogyny and intersecting inequalities that sustain it. Simultaneously, the consistent depiction of institutional reforms as sufficient solutions to VAWG reinforced the state as the ultimate protector of women, positioning the resolution of VAWG within its control - thereby strengthening state authority while obscuring its complicity in perpetuating gendered harm.

Another key intervention lies in the intersectional lens applied throughout the analysis. By foregrounding how victim and perpetrator identities shape political responses, this dissertation underscores understanding that femonationalist logics operate in highly context-dependent ways. Ultimately, this research repositions femonationalism not just as a co-optation of feminist themes, but as a mechanism for racialised and gendered nation-building - where violence against women is instrumentalised to reinforce who belongs, and who does not.

8.1. Limitations and Recommendations

Although this dissertation attempted to mitigate limitations where possible, certain methodological constraints were unavoidable. These were not oversights, but carefully considered decisions made to ensure analytical depth and coherence within the dissertation's scope.

The primary limitations lie within the narrow dataset, restricted to parliamentary speeches that explicitly named victims within a one-year timeframe (or eight months for the Southport case). While this ensured consistency, it likely excluded broader or more implicit references to race,

nation, and immigration embedded in debates on women's safety. Future research would benefit from a broader dataset encompassing wider parliamentary discourse, incorporating instances when victims are not explicitly named. Similarly, as the analysis revealed that perpetrator identities - and how they are framed - are key sites where femonationalist logics operate, the dissertation's victim-centred focus should be expanded in future research. The incorporation of both victim and perpetrator discourses would enable a more holistic and critically comprehensive analysis of femonationalist logics.

While enabling meaningful comparison across distinct, high-profile instances of VAWG shaped by differing intersectional dynamics, the specific selection of these three cases inherently limits generalisability, as less publicised incidents may reveal different operations of femonationalist logics. The Southport case in particular introduced a collective dimension that, although enriching, complicated direct comparison with the individual cases of Everard and Nessa. While theoretically rich, this complexity might be better addressed in future research through larger datasets or more consistent case typologies.

Finally, this dissertation intentionally excluded grooming gang debates to retain analytical clarity. However, such narratives are central and unique to British femonationalism, often foregrounding race, religion, and national identity. Future research could focus on these debates specifically, offering insight into how SGBV is politicised in uniquely British ways.

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