

Citizenship and belonging in a women's immigration detention centre.¹

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Abstract

This chapter draws on six months of fieldwork in IRC Yarl's Wood, Britain's primary immigration removal centre for women, to explore the racialised logic of citizenship and nationality that underpin border control. Using women's testimonies, it seeks to 'give voice' to an otherwise silenced custodial population. In doing so, it seeks to enrich the predominantly theoretical literature on border control and challenge its pessimistic view of such places merely as 'zones of exclusion.' A second and related goal is to demonstrate the salience of detention centres – and migration – for criminological research on race/ethnicity. Detention centres are complex and nuanced sites where issues of race and nationality are under constant debate. While the government restricts migration, such places play an increasingly important role both in determining and managing populations who are unwelcome and in setting out a British national identity.

Key words: belonging; gender; colonialism; immigration detention; exclusion

Introduction

Under conditions of mass mobility, the relationship between citizenship and belonging has become increasingly interconnected, as neo-liberal states around the world have tightened border control, making it more difficult for large sections of the global population to enter legally or to remain in their countries. Such developments follow predictable, racialised, pathways in which citizens from the global 'south' have been particularly disadvantaged, despite long-standing chains of migration sustained by colonial and post-colonial relations with the economically developed North (see, inter alia, Balibar, 2004; 2005; Guild, 2009; Sassen, 2007). Migrants from these Southern states are treated quite differently from citizens of the European

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Union who have benefited from shared rights to move and work throughout the European Community.

Globalisation and mass mobility have also had a profound impact on the nature of contemporary criminal justice and criminal law (Aas and Bosworth, 2013). Increasingly pressed into the service of border control, prisons (Kaufman, 2012), police (Weber 2011; Bowling, 2012) and the criminal law (Stumpf, 2006; Aliverti, 2012; Dauvergne, 2008) have become global in outlook and effect. At the same time, Britain, along with other states pursuing neo-liberal policies, has introduced a slew of new immigration offences and constructed webs of immigration detention centres (Aliverti, 2012; Bosworth, 2012; Wilsher, 2012; Brotherton and Barrios, 2010; Kanstroom, 2012). Such developments symbolically and in quite practical ways signify and enforce the boundaries of the nation state through legal and affective categories of belonging.

Border control, particularly in its intersections with criminal justice techniques, has recast citizenship as a form of governance (Rygiel, 2010; Tyler, 2011). Non-citizens are subject to increased scrutiny and intervention while citizens constantly must prove their eligibility for the enhanced protections their legal status now guarantees (Zedner, 2010; Fekete and Weber, 2010). Such developments have been particularly skewed towards black and minority ethnic communities who find themselves subject to new forms of policing in the search for suspected terrorists, asylum seekers, and undocumented workers (Parmar, 2011). For these communities, longstanding and more recent fears about the 'enemy within' intersect with and amplify concerns about 'external threats' raising questions about belonging and entitlements even for long-term residents and UK citizens.

While a large immigration detention estate is relatively recent, its origins can be found in the Immigrants Appeals Act of 1969, which gave Commonwealth citizens the right to in-country appeal. Detention and immigration legislation is, thus, intimately connected to a racialised, post-colonial British national identity. Under these circumstances, it is surprising and somewhat disconcerting that so little of the burgeoning, interdisciplinary work concerned with migration control in criminology explicitly addresses race or ethnicity, while much of the criminological literature on race and ethnicity remains similarly uninterested in citizenship. Such oversights are all the more perplexing given the long historical connections between these matters.

Though the scale of mobility is new, much of the population on the move has been present in the UK for some generations (Hall, S. 2001; Hall, C. 2006). There have been prior moral panics about immigrants and crime and over assimilation and Britishness (Hall, S. et al, 1978; Gilroy, 1980). Critical race scholarship in criminology has productively focused on the role of the police in defining a racialised group membership (see, inter alia, Hall et al, 1978; Bowling, 1999; Bowling, Parma and Phillips, 2008). Years of research

demonstrate how black and ethnic minority men are subject to intrusive policing practices that implicitly and explicitly define them as not belonging, undeserving and potentially dangerous (Bowling, Parma and Phillips, 2008; Bowling, Phillips and Sheptycki, 2012). These days, for foreigners, the UK Border Agency plays a similar role. Those without UK citizenship, no matter what their legal status, simply do not have the same rights and protections as the rest of us (Zedner, 2010; Dembour and Kelly, 2011). Those in detention are particularly vulnerable, legally and symbolically denied recognition as subjects by their incarceration (Bosworth, 2011b; 2012).

This article takes one particular site – the women’s immigration removal centre Yarl’s Wood – to consider the lived experiences of this kind of racialised ‘precarity’ (Di Giorgi, 2010; De Genova, 2008). Drawing on six months of observation and interviews that we conducted with over 130 women and 30 staff from June to December 2010, as part of the first national, academic study of life in detention, it explores women’s views about identity, citizenship and belonging. In detailing women’s testimonies, this chapter builds its analysis on the views and experiences of this otherwise silenced custodial population. Their stories enrich and challenge the dominant understanding of border control that characterizes such places merely as ‘zones of exclusion’ both in the conflict they reveal within the detainee population and in their shared aspirations (for example, see Pratt, 2005; Gill, 2009; De Genova and Peultz, 2010; though see also Rygiel, 2012; Walters, 2008). As such, they raise important questions about recognition and shared group membership demonstrating the salience of detention centres – and migration – for criminological research on race/ethnicity. From a critical race perspective, these institutions, where the state wields almost unimaginable amounts of power against a dizzying array of nationalities, are both bewilderingly unfamiliar and depressingly predictable. As Effa, a detainee from the Cameroon, bluntly put it, “In here don’t see white people apart from those wearing uniforms.”

Detaining Women in Britain: The Research Context

IRC Yarl’s Wood is one of ten Immigration removal centres scattered around the country, which, together, hold 3000 men and women under Immigration Act powers. Others may be found in prison post-sentence, or in police lock-up.² Detainees are not serving criminal sentences, and, therefore, have little way of knowing how long they will be held. Although, legally, they should

² Whereas the numbers in police cells are never published, the Prison Service and other organisations periodically report the numbers of ex-foreign national prisoners. In 2011 a report by the Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency, John Vine (2011), counted 800 ex-prisoners held this way. By January 2012, a report released in response to a Freedom of Information Request from the Charity Detention Advice Services, showed that total had fallen to 595 (http://www.detentionadvice.org.uk/uploads/1/0/4/1/10410823/foi_21786_response.pdf, thanks to Hindpal Singh Bhui for providing me this reference).

only be detained if their deportation is 'imminent,' in practice IRCs hold some individuals for considerable periods.³

There is a national system of carceral institutions, yet detention centres vary considerably. They are contracted out by the UKBA to private companies and HM Prison Service and can feel (for detainees and staff alike) quite localized. Notwithstanding national guidelines and detention service orders, each institution operates under the terms of its confidential contract, offering slightly different activities, conditions, and food.

Yarl's Wood opened in November 2001 and is currently run by Serco. It is a secure custodial environment, situated behind razor wire at the back of a former Ministry of Defence site in Clapham, Bedfordshire. Surrounded by green rolling hills and quaint villages, Yarl's Wood is not easily accessible without a car, since it is situated nearly 20 minutes drive from the nearest train station.⁴ It was originally twice the size and designed to hold as many men as women, but, within months of its opening, the male detainees destroyed their section, burning it to the ground.

The current building holds over 400 detainees in four residential wings and a segregation unit, all of which, given the women's ultimate enforced 'flight', are somewhat ironically named after birds: Dove, Avocet, Crane, Bunting and Kingfisher. Until January 2011, when they were relocated to Tinsley House and then to the so-called 'pre-departure accommodation' Cedars Unit near Gatwick airport, the Crane wing held families with young children. These days it contains married couples, families with adult children and, since March 2012, a small number of single men as well. Bunting is an induction unit, where women are placed for their first few nights, while Kingfisher is the segregation unit.⁵

In the two regular housing units of Yarl's Wood, women are grouped in pairs in small rooms that include a separate shower and toilet area. On Bunting, the rooms are single occupancy, whereas on Crane families of four may be placed in adjacent rooms with interlocking doors. Most of the rooms, other than those in Kingfisher, look over grassy outdoor association areas. They include a small wardrobe, a desk and a notice board. A small television set with an integrated VCR player is bolted to the wall. With their brightly coloured curtains and shabby furniture they resemble student halls of residence as much as prison wings. Yet, each housing unit is connected to

³ In the month of November 2010, for example, the average length of stay in Yarl's Wood was 2 months. Around 1 in 5 women, however, had been there for 100 – 500 days (Serco, 2011).

⁴The center runs a free coach service to and from Bedford train station most afternoons to help those making social visits. Lawyers or other advocates who can visit in the morning have to make their own way there.

⁵ In IRCs detainees may be held for a short period (usually only up to 24 hours) in segregation on either R40 or R42. Those on R42 are usually held only briefly. In either case their segregation must be signed off by the in-house UKBA contract manager.

the main part of the institution by an iron gate, which can only be opened by a staff member carrying keys.

For much of the day detainees are free to wander around the building, carrying the key to their room with them. However, they are never allowed into any other residential unit than their own. They are locked in their unit for lunch and dinner, and, following an evening period of general association, must remain there from 9pm – 9am. Each unit has its own dining room and a number of small lounge areas containing sofas from Ikea, a television and some books.

Those who leave the units during association time can mingle with others in the main area of the institution where there is a large indoor gym, a doctor's surgery, a library, a hairdressing salon, a small indoor cinema, a 'cultural kitchen', and a number of designated religious areas including a Christian church, a mosque and a Hindu/Sikh temple. Some detainees congregate on the 'activities corridor' that includes an art and craft area and an IT room equipped with computers from which they may email friends and family outside the centre.⁶ Others sit in small 'association' rooms, chatting to one another or calling friends and relatives on their mobile phones.

The 'cultural kitchen' can be booked for a whole day by 6 women at a time. They are provided with raw ingredients and are allowed to cook lunch and dinner under the supervision of a Detention custody officer (DCO).⁷ The room is decorated to resemble a middle-class British family house, complete with dining table, sofa, large screen television and a CD player. The Ikea tableware is brightly coloured and the kitchen implements and electric goods homely; these are not institutional items, but ones picked out at the local superstore, including a mid-range quality kettle, microwave, oven, and blender. The women are allowed to bring in their own DVDs and CDs and quite often everyone ends up dancing after the meal is finished. They are not allowed to share the food they make with any women other than those in the room, although custodial staff members routinely drop by to sample it.

Notwithstanding its range of activity areas, there is a minimally structured regime in Yarl's Wood. The centre offers scant paid work other than 'servery' and cleaning, while education, at least when we were present, was limited to a few hours of art and craft on weekdays. Whereas most of the men's institutions we visited as part of the wider study offered IT training and ESOL classes, Yarls' Wood IT officer did not seem to provide any lessons, and the centre deployed their trained ESOL teacher as the librarian. She

⁶ Many of these spaces are duplicated on the family unit, reflecting the historical segregation of the two populations. When Yarl's Wood still held children they were always kept wholly apart from the single women other than in the visiting hall.

⁷ When we began our research the DCO would collect cash from the women and buy specialist ingredients for them from local shops. This practice, however, was soon abandoned due to questions over parity and the staff member's time. From that point detainees were able to select from items used in the institution's own kitchen.

helped individual women who asked for assistance with learning how to read and write. However, she did not teach formal classes. Instead, she had the women read out the words of a dictionary. One day, as a member of the research team (MB) was hanging around in the library, a Chinese woman, Cory, asked her to help her in this task. In one of the ironies of fieldwork, that day, Cory had reached the letter R: 'resist, revolt, revolution.'

Together then, Yarl's Wood offers carefully choreographed levels of freedom within constraints. The women are allowed to wander, but not everywhere. They are free to cook, but not to share their meal. They are encouraged to speak English, but not to learn it. In these and many other ways, the institution includes while simultaneously excluding the detainees from a range of everyday expectations and practices. Not quite prisoners, yet certainly not free, the 'residents'⁸ (not citizens), in detention exist literally and symbolically in a liminal space. Under these conditions, questions of identity become important mechanisms for sorting, coping and understanding, at the same time as matters of identity remain also always the basis and justification for detention itself.

Identity Matters: Diversity in Detention

The residents of Yarl's Wood are a mixed population, united primarily by their lack of British citizenship. Some are ex-prisoners, others failed asylum seekers, and still others visa over-stayers. Most have lived in the UK for many years. Nearly all are awaiting deportation or removal.⁹ The centre holds an additional population of asylum seekers who have been designated eligible for a 'fast track' decision. These women, whose cases have been flagged as unlikely to succeed, attend the Yarl's Wood Asylum and Immigration Tribunal that is accessible via a locked door from within the removal centre.¹⁰

Though detainees in principle can hail from any part of the world, their nationalities reflect broader historical and contemporary migration trends. Like many of the migrants in the broader British community, detainees tend to be from former British colonies. Unlike the wider population, however, removal centres hold very few Australians, New Zealanders or Canadians. Rather, their inhabitants originate in the so-called 'New Commonwealth,' with particular concentrations from Nigeria, Jamaica and Pakistan. Yarl's Wood, in common with other 'removal' centres, also houses a number of Chinese and Vietnamese nationals.

⁸ This was the preferred term used by staff to refer to the women, rather than 'detainee'.

⁹ Though in practical terms these processes have the same outcome: exclusion from British soil, legally they are distinct and follow separate administrative processes. While former offenders are usually deported, visa over-stayers may be removed. In both cases their exclusion from Britain prevents them from entering other EU countries as well. This nature of state power is referred to elsewhere as the 'Ban-opticon' (Bigo, 2008; Aas, 2011).

¹⁰ On gender and asylum more generally see Baillot, Cowan & Munro, 2012 and Querton, 2012. On asylum and the law see Thomas, 2011.

At the time of our fieldwork, Yarl's Wood counted 63 different nationalities among its population (Serco, 2010). Only the top ten -- Nigeria, China, Jamaica, India, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Ghana, Pakistan, Brazil and Uganda -- corresponded to groups of ten or more women. The rest of the national groups were much smaller, with the majority accounting for only one or two women in the institution. In addition to their range of citizenship, women also differed from one another in terms of their religion, their length of stay in the UK, their prison record and their marital status. While the predominant religious groups were Christian, Muslim, and Hindu, there were many kinds of denominations of each, as well as other belief systems and those who were not religious at all.

This diversity encouraged many types of social exchanges. Some women enjoyed getting to know people from other countries and cultures. Although upset about the length of her incarceration, Pam, an elderly woman from Nigeria who had worked in the UK for many years as carer before being imprisoned for document offences, typified this view of detention:

“When I came here, sometimes I think is the wish of God that I should come to a place like this. But I never wanted it to be too long. So as we've seen so many people from different backgrounds. If I'd not come here I wouldn't have known. If I see them maybe television or on the streets, I would just walk past them. But now that I'm here... It's a wonderful thing.” (Pam, Nigeria)

Pam found that the experience of detention enabled cultural sharing and communication. Other detainees, however, were not so open-minded, preferring the company of their co-nationals, turning to them for friendship and support. “In here,” Ara claimed, “people just tend to straight away go for their own nationality. It doesn't really matter if it's the type of person they hate, because it's from their nationality, it's like this weird bond that's instant.” (Poland). For still others, however, the problem was intractable and the sheer range of people disorienting. “I don't really have friends like close friends,” Isa admitted sadly, “Because to me, you know, we have different styles, different nature, different spirit” (Nigeria).

Indeed, in contrast to Pam's appreciative stance, ‘difference’ was often the source of considerable tension and conflict in Yarl's Wood. To a far greater extent than in the men's facilities we visited, there were frequent disputes between Chinese nationals, Jamaicans and Nigerians. Racist comments in English, Mandarin and other local dialects were common currency between these three groups. Jamaican and Nigerian women often mimicked Chinese accents and made up speech patterns, referring to them as ‘chin chow min’. For their part, Chinese nationals maligned black women as overly sexual, promiscuous, and aggressive, referring to them by the highly pejorative appellation of ‘black ghosts’. At times the hostility between these groups erupted into violence:

“In the past, black ghosts always jumped the queue and the officers would not stop them. There is only once that a Chinese girl jumped the queue and was disciplined by the officer. On that day, I spotted a black woman jumped queues again, without any interference by the officer, who is white. I felt angry and I thought it was unfair, getting into argument with the officer. The black ghosts heard it and insulted me. They then smashed a glass bottle on the corner of my forehead. You can still see the scar here... They locked me up after I was hurt and hardly gave me any medical treatment. Then when I finally got the chance to be examined by the doctor, he found that I have slight concussion. The officer didn't apologize to me, nor did she say anything to me so far. I am not asking them to do anything. I just hope that they won't be partial to the black ghosts all the time. It is unfair that there are certain things here that the black ghosts are do, but we as Chinese cannot do.” (Kyla, China).

What was most dispiriting about these interactions was the familiar racist tropes both groups deployed against the other, a strategy recognized by a Taiwanese detainee Cali¹¹ as she defused a conversation with a Nigerian woman in the art and craft room that was rapidly becoming antagonistic. As the topic turned to food, Cali claimed laughingly that, when she next used the 'cultural kitchen', she would “eat dog! Dog keeps you warm!” (Cali, Taiwan). In this instance, the (white) custody officer Leah joined in the 'joke' urging Cali not to eat her pet “Staffy.”¹²

Further problems arose between different religions. Non-Christians complained about the noisy midnight services of their Evangelical neighbours. Even those who were themselves devout expressed concerns about other ways of praying.

“If I want to go to church it's always full with Africans or Chinese, but I don't get time to even sit quietly and pray. I use the garden for my pray. And I don't like to pray so loudly and disturb everybody... But I have seen faith in African people, honestly. They literally pray, pray, pray from morning to night they are praying. I hope it has some meaning. Means the matter of praying is very important. I was telling some of them, because shouting and you know, playing the drums loudly or just lying on the floor and offering yourself to Jesus, I don't think it's the right way to go about.” (Gena, India).

¹¹ Cali, who had lived legally in the UK for over two decades with her English husband and children was deported to Taiwan following a criminal conviction. While in Yarl's Wood she acted as an unpaid interpreter for many of the Chinese women. She found this role emotionally demanding and exhausting.

¹² Staffordshire terrier.

Additional factors divided the population as well, from banal everyday complaints over food to more serious ones of discrimination. Many African and Chinese women blamed the [entire] Asian population, at least in part, for the food, claiming that it was too spicy and 'Indian' for them. They also suggested that Asian detainees received preferential treatment from the small number of Asian staff. Others spoke of pressure to hide their sexual orientation. Nia, from Malawi, for instance, who was claiming asylum as a lesbian kept her story secret in Yarl's Wood: "I can't tell them about who I am because they are African and they will judge me. So I just am alone" (Nia, Malawi).

Mental illness was also, for some, highly stigmatized. "I am on antidepressants now since I had the shock...", Cora (from Zimbabwe) told us, "In my country it is taboo to take medication. We don't take anything about depression or stress. I am so embarrassed to tell the other women. They will think I am crazy." Finally, some were ashamed about their criminal conviction. Pam from Nigeria, who otherwise emphasized the positive aspects of her detention experience, was concerned about the impact of her criminal sentence in detention and when she was returned:

"You know the other African women they look at me and say, you are criminal. They say that other person was working with fake documents, why did they bring me in here? They did not bring other people in here. They said that they were taken from work too and with fake documents but don't understand why they took you to prison and not me. All my African sisters look at me as a criminal. Why did they choose me for this? Why did they bring me in here? When the time in prison finished I thought they were going to let me out or send me back home, but they did not. Why did they choose me? Why don't they take me home? What have I done to deserve this? I will be labeled for life." (Nigeria).

As Effa explained it,

"There is a lot of tribalism in here... Jamaicans think the Africans are very primitive, so they're very nasty towards us. And we think some other cultures are primitive too. So we say things about them behind their backs... so you have this whole mix up... We're quite nasty to each other to be honest, which is sad, we are. Even among the Africans. No, even among the Africans, they're quite rude. And Nigerian will talk to this one [a woman from Malawi] like she's some kind of -- you know..." (Cameroon)

Such divisions among the detainees reveal a population, however uneasily, marked out by its "hyper-diversity." (former IRC Manager, HMIP). As in the community, cultural overlap coexists in such places with cultural conflict. Yet, inside the detention centre both are intensified by the conditions of

confinement. As one staff member at Yarl's Wood put it rather clumsily, "diversity is where we are here." (DCO, Troy).

It is ironic, then, that in their emphasis on citizenship and nationality, the logic of immigration detention explicitly denies the relevance of diversity. In legal terms, detainees are simply not British. They are foreigners and non-citizens. They do not belong in Britain, so their particular perspectives on culture and national belonging are easily discounted. According to immigration law their nationality is all.

The binary logic justifying detention centres sits in stark contrast to their detained population. The dissonance between these factors is often disorienting for staff and detainees alike. In response, detainees expend considerable energy attempting to claim an equivalent form of citizenship that might over-rule their legal status, while staff members frequently differentiate between detainees, viewing some as deserving and others as undeserving of deportation. In these kinds of discussions, which one of us has covered in more detail elsewhere (Bosworth, 2011b; 2012), staff and detainees debate the grounds for recognition. One long-term British resident raged against her situation, comparing herself to the prime minister, David Cameron, her hyperbolic tone revealing the extent of her frustration with finding a legitimate identity from which to appeal her predicament. Drawing on a familiar moral hierarchy she casts herself first as a worker and then as a mother, yet, as she recognizes both subject-positions, usually revered, are reduced to nothing by her lack of citizenship.

"I have paid taxes in this country. I have worked. My children are outside. My son has been suspended from school. He is 10 and my daughter is 17. And they tell me I don't have enough family ties? What is the relationship of a mother with her children? Is that not strong enough? You see Cameron rushing to be by the side of his father and he rushed there before he died as there are ties between father and son. He has his own family and children and he still has ties to his 70-year-old father. And my children are not tied to me? And they are so young and need me but they tell me there are not strong ties. Cameron is tied to his young daughter, and I am not. Whose children are these? Do they know how tied a mother is to her children? But God punished him. His son died and his father died." (May, Jamaica).

In accounts like this detainees seek legitimate subject position from which to be recognized. Staff, too, search for answers, finding the treatment of some detainees more troubling than others.

These matters are painful and, as such, are not ones that many staff voluntarily explore. Members of the senior management team explicitly discouraged emotional engagement with the detainees, a view that was reiterated to us by staff as a requirement that they exhibit "empathy not sympathy." Whereas detainees who seek to resist their removal have little

choice but to try to make themselves heard, staff learn to shut down and to generalize; saving their emotional energy for a small selection of individuals. As Todd said, “when I first started, it weren't easy. But now, I would say, probably say I was a bit blasé, but I just deal with it.” (DCO)

If recognition calls matters of citizenship into question, lack of recognition, in day-to-day life in detention was often facilitated by ideas about nationality. Just as the citizenship detainees sought to assert was not a legal one (Bosworth, 2012), nor is the staff's understanding of nationality. Rather, citizenship is elided by staff into ‘nationality’ – a series of ‘others’ all too easily synonymous with racialised stereotypes.

Although they were always careful not to be overtly racist with us, staff commonly differentiated between ‘polite,’ ‘aggressive,’ and untrustworthy national groups. As one male officer literally stuttered in his bid to explain what he meant while avoiding saying anything too pejorative:

“each nationality has certain...I'll use the word, ‘traits’ but it sounds a bit of a negative word. Certain characteristics about, about them. For instance a, a Nigerian lady is not like a Chinese lady in, in behaviour or, or, or anything like that... some, some nationalities are much more volatile than others but I'll, I'll, I'll say Sri Lankan people are the most calm and, and easygoing and passive people you could meet, whereas it could be said that some of the African nationalities are quite volatile...” (DCO Sean)

Reflecting (and presumably shaping) the institutional relationships, many staff members in formal interviews and in passing conversation explicitly contrasted Chinese and Jamaican women. Their views, however, were inconsistent. For one female DCO who worked on the activities corridor, the “the Chinese nationality” was “extremely intelligent” and “very educated,” unlike the “Jamaican ladies” whom, she claimed, were not (DCO, Leah). In contrast, Sean negatively compared the hygiene of Chinese women to the “Jamaican ladies” who were “absolutely fastidious about cleanliness.” While most commonly, a nurse in healthcare complained about the difficulty of communicating with the Chinese women and criticized the Jamaican population for being aggressive. “Culturally”, Alys said, “they're very, they're quite loud, they're quite shouty.... That can be quite difficult.”

Even those who appeared not to favour one group over the other characterized them in starkly different terms. Troy, for instance, first appeared to emphasise their similarities, asserting that, “the Jamaicans and Nigerians and the Chinese are loud by nature. Or by culture, whatever you want to call it.” (DCO, Troy). The reason for their behavior, however, he attributed to quite different causes:

“Chinese are easier to control, yeah, because I think they've been used to authority more in their life. The Nigerians and

Jamaicans are much more difficult to control... Why? I don't know the answer... Maybe because they've had to fight for things from day one, you know. Fourteen children at the table, scrabbling for whatever's there, I don't know. I'm guessing, you know, speculating. But they're much more difficult to control than the Chinese. Chinese respect authority. Nigerians and Jamaicans don't. Not the authority that they see me as, you know." (DCO, Troy)

These staff views are intimately linked to the purpose and justification of detention centres. As sites designed to exclude on the basis of nationality, removal centres present subjectivity purely as a matter of legal citizenship. Other aspects of people's lives cease to matter and detainees are rendered effectively 'unrecognizable.' Matters are compounded by the material similarities between these institutions and prisons (high walls, segregation blocks, keys, razor wire) that impute a level of dangerousness and culpability to those confined within. National stereotypes, particularly racialised ones, further these institutional effects, denying the familiarity of much of the population along with their goals and aspirations. In so doing, they ease the conscience of (some) line staff and assist in repudiating individual claims. Together, the binary logic of citizenship and the racialized national categories delegitimize the women's claims and aspirations while also redirecting attention away from their gendered effect. It is this final issue, of gender, to which turn in the next section.

Longing and Belonging in a Global World

Soon after we arrived in Yarl's Wood, a senior member of the onsite UKBA team at Yarl's Wood proudly asserted that, "There is a fantastic community spirit here. You can see it in how the ladies sit around doing clothes, hair and nails. They are always smiling." (Abby, UKBA). This heavily feminized view of cosy companionship denied the evident fractures and tensions that subsequent interviews with women revealed. It also glossed over the more troubling gendered aspects of many of these women's lives, a number of whom had survived considerable levels of domestic violence, often at the hands of husbands, fathers and brothers. For these women Britain had offered a gendered sanctuary that Yarl's Wood and UKBA were working to deny.

For Arah, the link between gender, safety and economics was direct. Her sense of security depended on her material situation. "In UK, as a woman, I felt, you know, safe and, you know, okay, you know, like food, you know, you don't have to struggle to buy food, you know.... Back home you have to struggle." (Jamaica) For Evie, the dangers lay closer to home. Her mother had given her money to leave, but the British state would not allow her to stay. "My problem is my father and that's it. Hitting ... all the time hitting, all the time like you're a bitch, in my country, what my father does is normal, the police won't help..." (Evie, Turkmenistan)

Safety, the women pointed out in a variety of ways, was intimately connected to their capacity for agency and autonomy. Without it, they could not truly be themselves. "In Africa the men dominate. Women just have to do what they say. There I am subdued, I cover my hair. Here I can express myself." (Ena, Gambia) As the basis for their immigration case, however, such claims were weak. In an account alluding to, but not fully articulating sexual violence, Nya from Uganda wept, as she said, "I was told I didn't have proper ties here, because I have no children, because I am not married. But there are some things I cannot do because of what happened to me."

Others were more recognisably political, using the language of equal rights familiar to most liberal feminists. Kela, from Nigeria, for instance, believed that "In UK whatever man can do, I think woman can do it.... Back home is a bit, it's not that the same. Because sometimes our men, they don't give chance to a woman." Struggling to articulate herself in a language in which she was not fluent, Kela worried that her capacity to be herself would be compromised upon return:

"Sometimes the men ... back home... will say 'No. You are a mother, you need to take care of the house'.... in white system, they used to give that opportunity to people like you can use your brain. You can make use of your brain. But back home, most of the time they don't really give that chance.... Feel well here because in this country, I don't know how to put it. In this country they give you that more chance to do something. More than back home." (Kela, Nigeria)

For these women, their banishment from Britain, made possible by their citizenship status, would deny them the capacity for agency and self-determination, locking them into traditional gender roles which they longed to transcend.

Not all the stories were equally as bleak. Some women were happy to leave. Others had always intended on going, though perhaps at a later point in the future. So, too, in many interviews, detainees (and staff) resisted the exclusionary logic of detention and deportation. Hali, who had spent 15 years working in UK, insisted her time had not been wasted:

"Oh, the best part, the best part of my life which I will never forget, even if I'm deported, the best part of my life is UK. Yes! Because at least I achieved my dream - I want to be a nurse. I'm so happy. Even if I go to Nigeria and die, I don't regret my stay in the UK. Yes, I don't regret it." (Nigeria)

Likewise, Cory, a former factory worker from China, retained a dogged admiration for England itself, despite her current predicament. Cory, who had come to England because, as she said, "I want to change my life. So have a better life, was in China very hard. So, and also can give more education my daughter, yeah." Until the UKBA came to her door one morning with an arrest warrant, England had borne out her hopes. She had made new

friends and formed a romantic relationship with a man who wanted to marry her. Notwithstanding her looming administrative removal, she continued to speak approvingly of all things British from the food to the landscape, sighing

“Oh, England. I love the English culture, like, I like the English garden and then the... people have a very private life. And I like English National Trust.... Beautiful place. Yeah. I couldn't find that sort of place in China.” (Cory, China)

It was not just detainees who refused to accept the oppositional discourse of belonging and exclusion. Staff, too, played a role. Though for the most part, they referred to detainees unquestioningly as ‘foreigners’ and outsiders, all sought, at times, to be compassionate and understanding, sometimes breaking detention centre rules in the process to mail a letter outside for a detainee or to bring in a particular item for them. Less controversially, a Welfare officer established a scheme by which the women could transfer funds from their inaccessible UK bank accounts into a local credit union that would then hand over the cash. In his view, they had earned the money and so should be allowed to take it with them.¹³ “We have some real gifted people that come through these places,” the Christian pastor asserted, “Doctors and people with PhDs and, you know, Masters and all sorts.”

Conclusion: Diversity, Detention and Exclusion

With their high walls and razor wire, as well as metal doors, locks and keys, immigration centres are clearly modeled on prisons, harnessing the power of the state to exclude. Compounding matters, even before deportation or removal has occurred, their restricted regimes make clear the logic and inevitability of exclusion; the population is evidently not considered worth investing (much) time or energy in occupying. In Zygmunt Bauman’s (2004) terms, such examples paint detainees as merely the ‘waste product’ of globalization; a precarious labour force (Di Giorgi, 2010) subject to ‘the deportation regime’ (de Genova and Peultz, 2010).

Yet, as this chapter has argued, these centres are more than simply symbolic zones of exclusion, peopled with ‘non-citizens’. Rather they are filled with people each of whom has a life story, and most of whom are busy making claims, building relationships, quarrelling with one another and the staff. In order to understand these places better, far more attention needs to be paid to life inside them.

¹³ Many undocumented workers either share bank accounts or use savings accounts from which they can only withdraw in person upon presenting their pass book. Once in detention these people effectively lose access to their savings. The system established at Yarl’s Wood enabled women to instruct their bank to transfer their funds into the local credit union who would then hold regular surgeries in the IRC to enable them to withdraw their cash.

As the women's accounts in this chapter movingly demonstrate, contemporary practices of detention and deportation that are justified by citizenship and facilitated by long-standing racialised tropes about dangerous and undeserving 'Others', have a highly gendered effect. As such, they remind us that questions of citizenship and nationality – which both define life in the detention centres and legitimate it – are related at fundamental levels to beliefs about what it means to be a woman and to have an opportunity at being a self in the world. For what these women fear most is the loss of subject hood itself, and with it, the capacity of experiencing and shaping life in their own terms. In their fears we hear an echo of Judith Butler's (2010: 31) warning that "Part of the very problem of contemporary political life is that not everyone counts as a subject." Non-subjects, she asserts, in typically opaque terms, are particularly precarious, existing outside our usual ethical and normative frames and expectations, as well as sometimes outside the law. They are 'ungrievable,' expendable, unrecognizable (Kaufman and Bosworth, 2013).

By segregating foreign citizens behind bars, detention centres materially, and metaphorically, excise those within them from the wider British community, erasing their subjectivity and refusing them the benefits of shared group membership. In so doing, they deny the reality, that a DCO casually noted one day, in a wide-ranging discussion about her local town, Bedford, "you sit next to these people on the bus every day. They are part of the community." (DCO, Leah). Strangers in a strange world though some of them are, detainees express remarkably familiar aspirations to citizens: a desire for safety, autonomy and agency. When viewed through this lens of recognition, rather than exclusion, the costs and contradictions of immigration detention become clearer. It is not just that they foster an exclusionary notion of British national identity, but also that they deny shared bonds of humanity.

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