

Race, Criminal Justice, and Migration Control: Enforcing the Boundaries of Belonging
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CHAPTER

13 'Working in this Place Turns You Racist': Staff, Race, and Power in Detention

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Abstract

Drawing on fieldwork in two British immigration removal centres (IRCs), this chapter discusses staff accounts of race and racism in detention. Designed as places to expel unwanted foreign citizens, IRCs are highly racialized institutions as nearly all residents within them are members of an ethnic minority. What is it like to work in such places? How, if at all, do staff members internalize or promote ideas about race and racialization? What happens when the staff members themselves are migrants or second-generation British citizens? How do they view and interpret ideas of race? What is their status within the workforce? By focusing on staff accounts rather than detainees, this chapter seeks to widen our understanding of the ways in which these institutions of confinement maintain, reinforce, and maybe sometimes disrupt ideas of race and belonging in British society.

Keywords: affect, ambivalence, colonialism, diversity, expertise, ethnography, immigration detention, nationality, racism, staff

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Introduction

In this chapter, drawing on observations and interviews with staff[1] in the two adjacent facilities that make up Heathrow Immigration Removal Centre (IRC),[2] I will describe how officers deploy racialized notions of national identity as a means of making sense of their job, the detainees, their colleagues, and themselves. This racialized form of nationalism is shaped by and frames officers' experiences and interpretation of their job and the work culture in which they operate. While some believe that they bring their views with them to their job, others describe how the institution itself influences their opinions. In both cases, their views do not remain sequestered within the IRC, but become part of how these people perceive foreigners and ethnic minorities in their communities outside the walls of the establishment. In so doing, they reveal the importance of examining life within these hidden sites for understanding their wider effect.

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Nearly all detainees, in any IRC, are not white, while most of those who guard them are. Yet, race in detention, as elsewhere, is rarely a simple binary matter. Not only are some of the staff members in these sites first-generation minority ethnic British citizens, or more recent migrants, but the sheer cultural and linguistic diversity of those who are confined prevents a simple articulation of race or racism. Rather, IRCs
p. 215 are sites where race and ethnicity are primarily decoded and understood through ↳ national stereotypes. In them, contemporary concerns about religion, ethnicity, and culture mix with enduring, colour-coded matters of race (Bhui 2016; Bosworth and Kellezi 2015; Cole 2009; Sáenz and Douglas 2015). Accounts are not fully consistent, nor do they go unchallenged. Stereotypes, nonetheless, act as important strategies through which officers transform and domesticate 'difference' into a form of 'expertise'; their ideas about race, ethnicity, and national identity, in other words, are central to how they do their job. They also generate moral and affective distance between staff and detainees. In so doing, symbolically and in quite practical ways, race and ethnicity are used to justify these institutions and their role in casting out specific individuals and groups who live among us (Bosworth 2014; 2016).

In the following sections I offer an overview of the detention system before turning to the research. As I shall demonstrate, officers rely on racialized stereotypes in everyday and more symbolic ways to make sense of their job, the detainees, and themselves. By concentrating on staff testimonies, this chapter offers a small-scale, textured account of the 'racial project' of immigration enforcement practices, in which, 'immigration controls, laws, bureaucracy, and government technologies … promote racial hierarchies around citizenship and belonging' (Armenta 2017: 83; see also Goldberg 2001; Hernández 2012; Provine and Doty 2011). In so doing, it reminds us that the manner in which ideas of race take root is as much a topic for empirical investigation as it is for conceptual analysis and political action. Detail is crucial for understanding.

Context: Staff and Immigration Detention in Britain

On any given day the UK has around 3,500 women and men incarcerated across nine IRCs, most of which are located in the South East of the country.[3] A further sum are placed in prison, post-sentence under Immigration Act powers, while another 100 are detained in Short Term Holding Facilities (STHFs) in ports and airports, where they may be held for short periods of time.[4] Over the course of a year, nearly 35,000 people pass through IRCs, of whom half are removed or deported. The rest either remain in detention or are released on bail or temporarily admitted into the UK.

Although there is a national detention system, there is no single provider. Instead, the centres are all contracted out by the Home Office either to HM Prison Service or to private custodial companies, which, at the time of writing, include GEO, G4S, Mitie, and Serco.[5] All but Mitie also run prisons.[6]

p. 216 Some of those who are placed in detention have been living in Britain for some time. They may have been reporting regularly to a police station or immigration office. Others have been surviving without regular(ized) immigration status. They may have been unknown to the authorities and caught unexpectedly in a workplace raid or found by chance during some other investigation. Still others will have come from prison, held awaiting mandatory deportation due to their criminal offence. A handful of people are detained straight from the border. For most, IRCs are meant to be the final destination before the airport. Yet, only half of those detained are, in fact, removed or deported.

Although one of the first ethnographic studies of immigration detention by Alexandra Hall (2010; 2012) concentrated on staff experiences, nearly all subsequent accounts have focused on detainees. As a result, we know very little about the practicalities of staffing, the number of officers, their race and gender, or their educational attainment, their salary,[7] or training.[8] We also have little evidence about how these employees perceive IRCs, the detainees they guard, or the legitimacy, nature, or purpose of border control practices in

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general (although see Hall 2010; 2012; Bosworth 2016; Bosworth and Slade 2014). On a more banal note, there is very little information about what they do each day.

Some of these gaps need to be filled if we are to understand how issues of race and ethnicity operate in detention. It is relevant, for instance, to know that the majority of staff members in most centres are white and British-born. At the time of writing, all centre managers are white. Nearly all members of the senior management team (SMT) in all IRCs are white as well. Similarly, reflecting the intersectional nature of identity, most centre managers and other senior staff are men. Although women can be found at all levels of seniority, they are in the minority.

As with other custodial institutions, staff are organized in a steep hierarchy. Starting at the bottom and moving upwards their positions include: Operational Support Officer (OSO), Detainee Custody Officer (DCO), Detainee Custody Manager (DCM), and the SMT.[9] Only SMT members do not wear uniforms. Within these categories people have particular duties, although all staff may be deployed wherever the operational head requires. OSOs usually staff the gate and do not have contact with detainees. DCOs, who spend the most time
p. 217 with those who are confined, may ↳ be activities based, or work on welfare. In a number of centres, those employed in activities wear tracksuits. The SMT, whose offices are typically located outside the main institution, are usually divided into heads of regimes, security, units, healthcare, and so on. At the top of the hierarchy is the Centre Manager.

Although officers, other than those in the SMT, are permitted to unionize, their capacity for collective bargaining is weak. The contracts protect basic labour rights. As part of cost-cutting measures, most companies are reducing the number of employees as they move towards what senior staff in Serco refer to as a 'hotel model' (personal communication).[10] It is therefore not surprising to find a high staff turnover in most institutions. Due to corporate confidentiality, however, once again the precise number of staff who resign each year is unknown. Yet, when conducting research in these institutions, it is common to witness groups of new recruits undergoing initial onsite training. The companies, it seem, consistently replenish staff numbers even as they seek to keep them at a minimum.

These stratifying issues, and in particular, the precarious nature of working in an IRC, are shaped by the contested nature of this form of custody and its uncertain status or purpose. As a result, few admit to actively pursuing a career in immigration detention. Most have either had lengthy careers in other fields, or have only recently left school.

In this research project, as in previous ones, many officers told me that their attraction to the post was primarily one of convenience; IRCs hire locally. Some had applied out of curiosity, others from economic necessity after being made redundant elsewhere. While some had been persuaded to join by friends and family members who were already employed in Heathrow IRC, a handful claimed they had responded to a generic post in the company, and were somewhat surprised to find themselves working in custody. 'I had no idea what the job was about', Garima[11] asserted, 'I thought it was actually just transporting detainees around. I didn't actually realize, it wasn't explained to me in the interview that I'll be working in the detention centre. Halfway through my training is when I realized' (DCO, Asian). Even when they knew they would be working in an IRC, few believed they had understood the nature of the job. 'I thought working for immigration, I thought it'd be what, what's on telly, when they're stamping passports', Peter sheepishly admitted (DCM, white).

As in prisons, a certain proportion of officers had previously worked in the military or in the police (see also Hall 2012). Some had tried out retirement and disliked it, or had been forced back to work by economic factors. Other, younger, men aspired to work for the police, and were biding their time in a detention centre while they waited for their local force to open a new recruitment drive.

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p. 218 Opinions about working in an IRC were neither uniform nor always self-evident. ‘I didn’t ever plan on being involved in law enforcement or probation or anything to do with that,’ Peter noted defensively. Some of his schoolfriends had ‘done time at her Majesty’s Pleasure,’ he explained, and he feared they would judge him if they knew he worked in a custodial institution. To those old companions, he claimed to be working ‘for the Home Office’. His anti-prison credentials were not really compromised, he insisted, since, ‘although you prevent them from escaping, and you lock them up, and for all intents, purposes you look like a screw, it’s, it’s kind of a step up from that.’ Matthew, Peter’s colleague agreed, asserting evocatively, if rather obscurely, that he thought his job was ‘below a policeman but above a milkman’ (DCO, white). As with colleagues elsewhere, most officers expressed considerable uncertainty and ambivalence about these sites of confinement and border control more generally (Bosworth 2014; 2016; Bosworth and Slade 2014).

Notwithstanding the enthusiasm of sections of the public and many politicians for these sites of confinement, IRCs have an unclear mission. Designed to facilitate deportation, only about half of their residents are ever expelled. Built like prisons, they are not places of legal punishment. Filled with foreigners, they are based on British soil. All these paradoxical features of the carceral environment create substantial uncertainty for staff and detainees, causing them to search for a vocabulary and framework of explanation. Under these circumstances, stereotypes about race and ethnicity offer an obvious set of tools to identify and make sense of one another. When cast in national stereotypes, these same ideas are presented by officers as evidence of their professionalism and expertise. They become, in effect, a crucial element of staff corporate identity and the legitimacy of these contested institutions.

Staff, race, and power

Race and ethnicity helped officers at Heathrow IRC manage the diverse population in a variety of ways. By drawing on stereotypes, staff were able to arrange the unfamiliar into some semblance of order. Essentialized, albeit inconsistent, accounts of nationality and diversity also allowed them to carve out emotional and moral distance from detainees. At other times, however, particularly for black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) officers, race and ethnicity were themselves a source of confusion and anxiety. Even as stereotypes offered an informal system of classification, staff in all centres struggled to understand or work with people of different skin colour, nationality, and religion. They found those who did not speak English well to be particularly challenging to manage or assist.

As in other removal centres, nearly all the detainees in Heathrow IRC were from the Global South, or from the edges of Europe. In 2015, the year the original research was conducted, the Independent Monitoring Board reported that the ‘ten nationalities most highly and consistently represented in the detainee population each month’ who accounted for around two-thirds of the total population were ‘Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Afghan, Vietnamese, Chinese, Nigerian, Albanian and Polish’ (IMB 2016: 8).

p. 219 As might be expected, few officers openly expressed racist views in front of a university researcher. Instead, for the most part, they drew on the terminology of national stereotypes. It was not just that they were being polite, however, but rather that, in these institutions of border control, nationality is racialized. Like Aliverti’s court officials and Parmar’s police officers, (see their respective chapters in this volume), staff accounts animated, intersected with, relied on, and amplified other familiar fears about crime and gender (see also Sáenz and Douglas 2015). In staff relations, class and education also played a role, shaping friendship groups and often acting as a barrier to trust among them.

Hugh, who had worked at Heathrow IRC for over a decade, outlasting a number of private contractors, shared his understanding of the men in his care. ‘Algeria, North Africa and the Middle East are self-harmers’, he asserted confidently. ‘Unlike the Africans, who love their bodies too much—they’re in the gym

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all the time. Instead, they do dirty protests.[12] The Chinese can put up a fight, though you wouldn't always know it,' he went on. 'They speak very little English' (DCM, white).

His colleague, Garima, a British Asian officer, used a similarly fine-grained framework that drew heavily on racialized national stereotypes. In her opinion, for instance, unlike other groups, Jamaicans do not really suffer in detention. 'They'll quite happily buy their own ticket and go back', she announced insouciantly. '[Because] they'll just get a new passport and come back again … we've seen the same faces with different names coming through the system 'cause they get picked up again for doing drugs or what have you' (DCO, Asian). For Maria, Iraqis were particularly difficult to manage because 'guys from Iraq don't respect women in their culture; women are nothing' (DCO, white). Her colleague, Gertrude, took matters even further, pronouncing categorically that detainees 'really are like children: you just need to set them to a task' (DCO, white).

Such accounts, however purportedly 'race neutral' in their reliance on nationality or other 'common sense' generalizations, cleave to traditional racist views, in which all non-whites are inherently childlike and stupid, blacks are aggressive and criminal, Chinese are devious, Asians compliant, and all Muslims misogynist (Fekete 2009; Hall et al. 1978; Kundnani 2007; Lewis 2013; Solomos 2003). All officers spoke about the population in these terms. Yet, only Gertrude was explicitly racist and even then, she was not talking about the detainees, but about her white husband's birthplace. 'South Africa was ruined', she told me casually over chicken Kiev in the staff lunchroom, 'when they handed it back to the natives, who've run it into the ground. The same thing is happening in the UK … ' (DCO, white).

It may be that everyone agreed with Gertrude, but were simply better at hiding their opinions.[13] A survey I
p. 220 conducted at the end of the fieldwork certainly revealed ↳ a considerable amount of anti-immigrant sentiment and anti-multiculturalism (Bosworth et al. 2016). When officers were asked to respond to the following statement 'There are too many migrants in the UK', nearly 60 per cent (58.8 per cent) agreed. If we overlook the 20.6 per cent who remained neutral, only 20.6 per cent disagreed. On the following statement, 'The government needs to be tough on migration to avoid the country being overrun', more than two-thirds (69.1 per cent) agreed, while only 17.7 per cent disagreed (Bosworth et al. 2016).

While such results suggest substantial levels of resentment among the staff towards the kinds of people in their care, in interviews and casual conversation, many officers across all grades, referred to the diversity of the population as one of the best aspects of their jobs. 'It is just a big mixing pot of different ages and races', Peter asserted enthusiastically,

> and I think that's fantastic. I love it … I think that's partially the reason I stayed in this job for as long as I have, is it's … it isn't what they're going through; it's all of their, their history. I find that fascinating, the fact that you've got guys in here from East Africa and South America and the Far East, and how their life experiences and trauma and this and that has all led them to end up in here, on some little island in Europe. I just find it really interesting how they've all been through various different ways, but they've all ended up here. So yeah. (DCM, white)

That Peter evidently found it stimulating to work with such a global population needs some explanation. The point is not that Peter was not racist whereas Gertrude was. Both relied on race, ethnicity, and nationality to help them to make sense of their role and the detainees without probing any further into difficult questions about the place in which they worked. Emphasizing the diversity of the detainees allowed Peter to differentiate between his job and that of a prison officer and reconcile himself to working in a custodial environment. Being a DCO, he believed, was far more challenging than working in a prison. 'You have to resolve a hell of a lot more problems', he claimed, '[and] you have to do all of that without any real punishment' (DCM, white). While Gertrude referred to detainees as children, Peter found them fascinating, just so long as, as he put it, they did not tell him too much about 'what they're going through'. In an

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unwitting articulation of 'colonial amnesia' (Bosworth 2016; Gilroy 2002; 2006; S. Hall 2001; Kaufman 2012), Peter evinced interest in the 'history' of detainees, wondering naively how all the men before him had somehow 'ended up' on this 'little island in Europe'.

Denied the penal powers of their colleagues in prison by the administrative nature of detention, officers searched for an explanation of the mission of the institution where they worked and their own professional identity. In reflecting on their job and its complex nature, many claimed that DCOs needed specific skills. In addition to such inexact matters as 'life experience' and 'inter-personal skills', staff often identified race and ethnicity as crucial forms of expertise. According to Paul, for example, matters were simple: a good officer has 'got to have quite a high technical knowledge of culture, of race, religion, [and] to a certain degree of the legal aspect' (DCO, white). This knowledge could be learned and drawn upon as a management skill.

p. 221 While the six-week training package for DCOs does include some training in 'diversity issues', most officers felt their understanding of foreigners had been transformed by their experience of working in an IRC. Roy, an older man who had been employed in Heathrow IRC for just three years after a long career in the building trade, explained haltingly, 'I was never a racist, but … I just didn't really know anything. I used to see someone and think, "He's a Pakistani" but now I know, "actually he's an Indian, he's a Sikh" and so on' (DCO, white). Peter described a similar experience: 'I grew up in a predominantly white area', he said, 'and coming here was the first time I'd probably spoken to anybody from Pakistan, or spoken with anybody from West Africa … this was all in the first week … and it was a real eye opener' (DCO, white).

Having grown up in a mixed-race family Astrid was more familiar with people from a number of different backgrounds. Yet, she, too, found that working in an IRC had altered her opinions about race and ethnicity. 'I believe the centre has made me put people in boxes, in terms of stereotyping, definitely', she asserted. 'Absolutely. Definitely' (DCO, mixed race). While reluctant to acknowledge the inevitable consequences of such stereotypes, claiming categorically that 'I never have been and I never will be racist', Astrid went on to describe the nationality of detainees in xenophobic terms, stating breezily that, 'I believe that, if you get a guy from Vietnam … he's been growing cannabis. You get a guy from Jamaica—he's brought drugs into the country. You get a guy from Poland—petty theft, shoplifting, drunk and disorderly. Don't even have to look.'[14]

Like Gertrude and Peter, Astrid did not consider her description of the detainees to be controversial. Her opinions did not spring from prejudice, she thought, but were rather evidence of her professional expertise, garnered after many years on the job. Having worked in detention for over a decade, she 'knew' what to expect of detainees without even having 'to look' at them. No interaction was necessary: she always knew how to make sense of the men she would encounter at work.

Such testimonies suggest that the development of a professionalized bureaucracy and work culture in IRCs hinges on racialized stereotypes. These same categories and this way of viewing detainees normalizes immigration detention, stripping out some of its moral ambiguity that officers might otherwise struggle to absorb when facilitating deportation (Bosworth 2016). By assigning detainees to an essentialized (and subordinate) subject position, officers like Peter, Roy, Gertrude, and Astrid were able to maintain emotional distance from them. As a result, and in contrast to literature about other carceral institutions, face-to-face encounters in detention failed to generate the moral proximity that scholars such as Zygmunt Bauman suggest are necessary for mutual recognition (Eriksson 2016). Rather, individuals were interpolated through universalizing rhetoric, grounded in familiar racial tropes—cast as expert knowledge—that amplified and intersected with criminalizing discourses. Seen in this light, staff expertise about diversity, whether
p. 222 celebratory like Peter's ↳ or more condemnatory like Astrid's, has the same effect: it assists in the process of estrangement that permits and justifies detention as well as the politics and practices of expulsion that these institutions enable (Bosworth 2014; Ahmed 2000).

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Managing diversity in the workforce

It is not just detainees who have to navigate essentialized notions of race and ethnicity. IRCs hire locally. Therefore, a significant proportion of officers at Heathrow IRC are Asian because the surrounding areas of Hounslow and Southall contain high numbers of Asian and mostly Sikh residents. There are also officers who have more recently arrived from Eastern Europe and Africa.[15] In these institutions whose legitimacy and professionalization hinge on othering and the development of racialized stereotypes, BAME officers as well as those whose first language is not English face particular conflict.

Most staff members at Heathrow IRC believed the diversity of the workforce made a better detention centre. 'We have a massively ethnic-diverse pool of staff in the DCOs, [and] they are beginning to be represented in the DCO manager grades', Jasper stated proudly. Speaking on behalf of the senior management team, he believed the key to a decent establishment lay in representation: 'We need … to be more representative of our own workforce, [and] the detainees we look after. You know, and a bunch of men managing a place misses a trick. You know, it's classic. Essentially, you know, it just needs to represent the people we care for' (SMT, white).

Others took a more limited stance, arguing only that a linguistically and ethnically diverse workforce made the IRC more efficient because officers could communicate more easily with those the government was seeking to expel. 'I think anyone who can understand the specific culturalisms—let's just put it like that—and can channel that to resolve things, is spot on', Peter said. 'You get an officer who speaks Urdu or Arabic, and they, "Brrabababa" … That just … calms it or resolves. In an ideal world', he went on, 'your staff group would be a bit like Noah's ark. So you have a male and a female officer from every country—I think that'd be fantastic. So you don't have cultural barriers, you don't have the language barriers. That would, I think that would resolve probably half of everything' (DCM, white).

Some officers queried whether the racial and ethnic diversity among the staff changed anything substantial about the institution at all. On the one hand, one white officer asserted, BAME colleagues were not necessarily sympathetic to detainees. 'You'll often find staff who are anti-immigration, who themselves are actually immigrants, let alone not white, you know', Marvin claimed, a little indignantly (DCO, white). On the other hand, BAME officers expressed some concerns about staff racism. 'You should have seen it, last shift that I'd done', Garima stated angrily, 'it was hilarious 'cause I went to the dining hall and, and we, and
p. 223 we did say amongst ↳ ourselves, we go, "Could there be a bigger division?" There's two tables, one is full of whites and one is full of Indians and blacks. How's that and that's staff I'm talking about not detainees, staff, right!' (DCO, Asian).

Officers raised a number of concerns, from the burden of being called upon by their white, monolingual, colleagues to interpret to complaints about pay inequalities and status. As others have found in prison, some minority ethnic officers felt under pressure to differentiate themselves from detainees to avoid being stigmatized by the same racialized stereotypes.[16] In particular, many were loath to use their language skills.

'I don't speak to them in Punjabi', Garima announced emphatically. 'I only speak to them in English. Unless I genuinely know that somebody cannot speak English because, if an Indian detainee can speak Punjabi and Hindi, I will answer them back in English 'cause I've heard them speaking English. Why should I then speak to them in Punjabi when they can speak English?'

It was not just that she did not want the extra work, but also that Garima was concerned about how she might be interpreted by her colleagues if she spoke in a language they did not understand. 'I don't want the third person standing there might think that I might be divulging information that I shouldn't or [that] I might be favouritizing them or whatever', she said defensively. 'So, I answer them in English, unless it's a genuine person who really cannot speak English. Only then will I speak to them in Punjabi' (DCO, Asian).

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Azima took a similarly strict line. ‘Well, yes, you know, I speak languages, and I can speak Punjabi’, she admitted. ‘So, you know, lots of detainees come to me. But’, she went on, ‘I treat everybody the same. I just apply the rules.’ Evidently worried, like Garima, about charges of potential corruption or favouritism, she went even further, noting that, ‘In fact, you know, the guys always say to me, “Miss, you’re so strict. Why are you so strict?” And I just say to them, “I’m treating you like I treat everybody else. I’m just doing my job” ’ (DCM, Asian).

In their interviews, Azima and Garima took different strategies in marking themselves out from detainees. Azima, who was climbing the corporate ladder, sought to emphasize her structural (economic, educational, gendered) difference from the detainees. Rather than her university degree, however, Azima, spoke of her distinction in cultural and nationalist terms. ‘I’m British-born Asian’, she asserted, ‘and we have a particular status. It’s very clear to the men that I’m British-born. They can tell by my accent. I don’t have an accent’ (DCM, Asian).

p. 224 Garima, in contrast, who had few educational qualifications, emphasized her religious identity. She was Hindu, whereas most of the men in Heathrow IRC, as they are in other detention centres in Britain, are Muslim. Echoing anti-Muslim sentiment that characterizes populist politics around Europe at present (see Bhui, this volume), Garima aggregated them, complaining that:

> They are always given priority. There used to be one mosque, one Gurdwara, one temple, one church. That still is the case, apart from now, there being the sports hall, every Friday converted for everybody from all over the centre going there. As if that’s not enough, then on each level, they go to the central spine to do it and do their prayers but each level, they have now taken out an association room for the detainees, which is for everybody, but made it for Muslims to do their prayers. So, how many mosques have they got? About fifteen to the ratio of one. Sorry, is it just Muslims that we have in the detention centre? How’s that fair? How is that on?

To make matters worse, she continued, the previous custodial contractor ‘would never serve any pork because it offended the Muslims but yet they’ve served beef that offends the Hindus and, and the Sikhs and everybody else.’ Recast as a matter of equality, this recognition of religious difference is seen as simply unfair. ‘Sorry, you either serve it or you don’t, or don’t offend anybody. Why is it okay to offend one lot or, and try to protect another lot, it’s, it’s, it’s not on’ (DCO, Asian).

By criticizing the institutional emphasis placed on Muslim detainees, Garima reproduced common rhetoric about the ‘tight knit’ and closed nature of this religious group and more generalized prejudice against them (Bhui 2016; Philips 2012). In so doing, like her colleagues, she effectively created distance between herself and those in her care.

Minority ethnic officers and those who spoke languages other than English such as Garima and Azima were not imagining matters. It was apparent in the research that, despite the official view, they did occupy a complicated and contingent position in these sites of confinement. They were marked out by their colleagues and by the detainees, by their apparent similarities with the detained population. Despite her avowed stance against racial prejudice, for example, Astrid quite openly resented her colleagues if they did not speak in English. ‘Sometimes where I work it’s quiet, and there’s me and a couple of others, and say they are Asian, and they’re talking in Urdu or Punjabi or whatever—that irritates me’, she reported. ‘It does my head in. Because I don’t know if they’re talking about me. And maybe that’s a paranoia thing on my part, but I think anybody in that situation would be like, “Well, why aren’t they speaking English?” ’ (DCO, mixed race).

Even though officers clearly value aspects of the diversity of their colleagues, as they sometimes do about the detained population, they often placed their colleagues into fixed categories based on purported

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'difference'. Under these circumstances, and notwithstanding the efforts officers like Garima and Azima made to differentiate themselves out from detainees, BAME staff members were unable to bridge completely the distance from their colleagues. In an institution based on exclusion, it proves hard to eradicate suspicion of others.

Conclusion

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As states around the world turn to immigration detention as a means of managing populations from the Global South, even while pursuing neoliberal and globalized economic policies that make such immigration inevitable, it is clear that these institutions are playing a crucial role in the construction and legitimation of race relations (Bhui 2016). Yet, as in most state institutions, racialization occurs obliquely. Immigration policies, like all official rules, are 'race neutral', even as they always seem to position the same people in the same place in the same hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Goldberg 2015).

Empirically these matters pose a challenge. How can we discuss race and ethnicity when they are officially disavowed as anything other than demographic categories? Officers know better, or at least enough, to mind their language in front of researchers. They may not even perceive their perspective as racist. And yet, as I have argued in this chapter, race and ethnicity, recast through the lens of immigration status and national origin, are key ways in which they make sense of their job, the detainees, and one another.

In seeking to control responses and language on ethnic and racial issues, the officers are and can only ever be partly successful. They are rarely consistent. While there are some commonalities in staff testimonies, the accounts by Azima and Garima remind us that BAME officers face particular challenges in these environments the logic of which draws their very presence into question. What are they doing on this 'small island', to use Peter's terms?

An optimistic interpretation of the inconsistencies of people's views might suggest that IRCs could offer some kind of unexpected lessons about the limits of racism, or the potential for multiculturalism to unite communities and individuals. Yet, erratic accounts of difference do little to ameliorate conditions in detention, or to challenge the logic of border control. So, too, the absence of explicit racism does not mean the institution and its staff are not racist.[17] Instead, it is clear that these institutions are saturated with judgements about difference, not only because of their goal of expulsion, but also because racialized stereotypes help officers understand the complex institutions where they work, their own role, and the population for whom they have responsibility.

In keeping with sociological traditions that tend to present prisons and detention centres as reflections of
p. 226 society shaped by importation and deprivation within ↳ (Crewe 2009; Philips 2012; Sykes 1958; Warr 2016), a member of the SMT downplayed the impact of working in an IRC on his employees' views, whereas others disagreed. 'Our staff would probably fit into two boxes', Jasper asserted, '*The Sun* reader' and 'Send them home and bollocks to them', kind of camp; and the more thoughtful, 'Actually, we need to care for people' (SMT, white). His own thoughts, he claimed, had been unaffected by his lengthy custodial career. 'The work doesn't impact my views on immigration at all. I still have my views, really.'

In a lengthy rumination, Peter offered a different view. 'I'd like to say working here hasn't affected my views of immigration', he began,

> but I think it has. I think there are stories I read, and you're either swayed one way or another. And I think a lot of it depends on what kind of week you've had. For instance, if you've had a week that's been heavily influenced by the kind of Arabic nations, and you've had a fairly stressful week, and they've been fairly problematic, then you might sway heavily on the, 'I don't want any more guys

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> from that area coming in.' But then if you've had a week where you've helped out three or four guys from that area, and they've been respectful and polite, then you sway the other way. So I think I haven't got any cut and fast opinions on any of them. I think I am heavily swayed by who I've interacted with. (DCM, white)

Astrid was more succinct. Working at IRC Heathrow had affected her interpretation of 'people on the street' (DCO, mixed race). Her views, which she felt were influenced by those she encountered at Heathrow IRC, did not stay within its walls, but rather affected how she interacted and viewed others in her community.

In this final set of examples, the productive role of IRCs in the racial state is made visible. Sites of 'exportation' as well as 'importation' and 'deprivation', they affect us all. These are not the total institutions that their architecture suggests. Rather, as officers generate and adjust their views of race, ethnicity, citizenship, and belonging in response to their experiences at work, they bring their 'expertise' with them into their daily lives outside. When considered in this light, it is clear that IRCs are fundamentally at odds with liberal aspirations for a tolerant and diverse society (Lewis 2005). Like the stereotypes they engender and rely upon, they need careful, robust, and systematic critique. Only then may we hope to challenge some of the racialized inequalities they engender and uphold.

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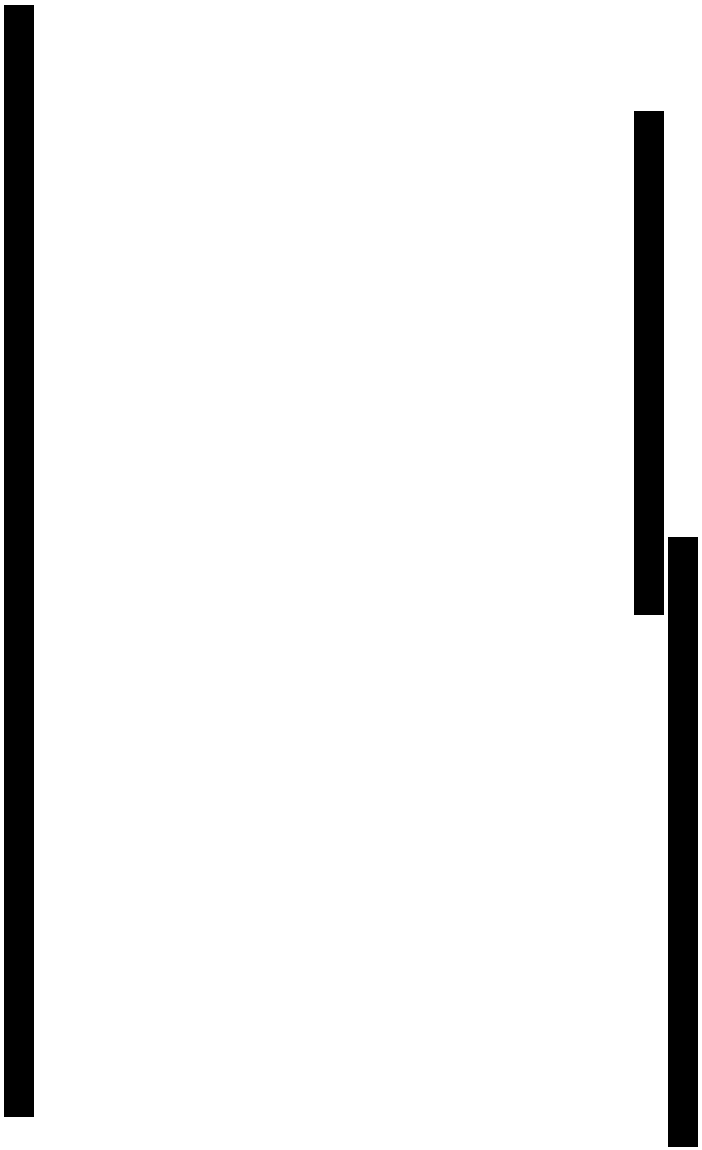
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they needed to progress professionally. A number of BME prisoners also suggested that BME staff took an exaggeratedly firm approach towards them for this reason, and some BME staff did suggest that they were under pressure to distance themselves from BME prisoners. One BME officer commented that 'staff see me talking to black inmates and they see it as a problem.' See also Philips (2005).

17 Research conducted in other IRCs has found examples of more explicit racist views from staff. For example, in IRC Morton Hall, when asked about changes to security that had occurred when the institution changed from a women's prison that primarily held foreign nationals to an IRC for men, one officer said laughingly: 'we increased security, built another fence as we had two escapes when we first opened as an IRC. When it was a women's prison it was boring. Nothing happened. I mean we had a lot of foreigners even then—big black women, but we were joking: can you imagine the size of the hole in the fence they'd have to cut to try and escape?!' (DCO, white, IRC Morton Hall).

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