Article

Reinscribing Migrant "Undeservingness" and "Deportability" Into Detention Centres' Visiting Rooms

Oyku Hazal Tural

Department of Sociology, University of Edinburgh, UK; h.tural@sms.ed.ac.uk

Abstract
Despite a growing literature that addresses racial connections in detaining immigrants for deportation purposes, research on how race and race-making operate in detention centres remains scant. This research draws on interview data collected from volunteers visiting detention facilities across the UK and bridges a Foucauldian analytics of power with a relational perspective on race and racism to explore ways in which race operates and is experienced and resisted by actors involved in everyday relations of the space. Findings illuminate everyday workings and interactional dynamics that characterise detention centres and varied interpretations of visitors about race and race-making in those spaces of confinement. Despite differences in interpretations, visitors' accounts commonly point to the centrality of racialising ideas of migrant "undeservingness" and "deportability" in shaping embodied, affective, and experiential realities of the visiting rooms of detention centres, and various ways in which actors resist those identifications.

1. Immigration Detention and the Impossibility of Race

Immigration detention is an important mechanism of the UK's "hostile environment" policy aimed at deterring those who might arrive in the UK in the future (Mainwaring & Silverman, 2017) and encouraging those already in the region to return (Schuster, 2005). Over the years, the neglect, forms of violence, abuse, and migrant deaths inside British immigration detention centres, officially termed immigration removal centres (IRCs), have increasing news coverage in connection with racism. Yet, despite racist language and abuse being exposed, issues of race and racism have often been downplayed in public discussions about immigration detention and deportation, and have not been adequately recognised within the critical scholarship on border(ing) practices (exceptions include Bhatia, 2020a; Lindberg, 2022; Singh Bhui, 2016; Turnbull, 2017). One possible reason for this neglect has been that there is no skin colour, religion, or language that unites the population that IRCs hold

and racism is often defined very narrowly as an intentional and mostly colour-coded act of discrimination, a line of argument that continuously occupies a central place in justifications of race-neutrality in bordering practices (de Noronha, 2019).

Today, British immigration detention facilities hold certain groups of migrants such as asylum seekers, noncitizens who have already served their prison terms, or those without documents who are increasingly being criminalised as a result of policy changes making previous immigration-related civic offences criminal ones (Aliverti, 2012; Bhatia, 2020a). These groups are being represented as "dangerous" offenders or as "unknowable," and therefore "ungovernable" "aliens" who pose a welfare and security risk to the nation-state (Malloch & Stanley, 2005). Like those offenders, asylum seekers are also being depicted as a "threat" by politicians and in the media, with words like "bogus," "economic migrants" arriving without authorisation, "abusers" of the system, and "illegal" people "deserving" of punishment

(De Genova, 2002; Sales, 2002). Therefore, until their cases are decided, all asylum seekers are also being treated with suspicion and targeted by policy measures under a hostile environment that degrades people by removing their rights and protection (Webber, 2019), thereby causing mental health-related and social harms.

Against this political background emphasising the "dangerousness" and "undeservingness" of some migrants, detention has been a system increasingly being used by governments to sort those deemed "bogus," "undeserving," and "must-be" criminals, from the "deserving" refugees. Currently, the UK is the only country in Europe without a time cap for detention. Immigration detention is institutionalised as an administrative and executive power, a legal formation that enables detaining people as long as the administrative process continues, indefinitely in some cases, without requiring any criminal conviction. Detained persons are being confined in facilities similar to prison estates which hold them in spaces distant from society, marking detainees' criminality through physical arrangements like fences, barbed wires, walls, and gateways underscoring the restriction of mobility, and through day-to-day operations such as locking and unlocking doors, headcounts, solitary confinement, security cameras, strip searches, or incentive systems (Bosworth & Turnbull, 2014). But unlike prisoners, detained persons do not know when and if they will be released, nor can they utilise penal law. Thus, they have no recourse to procedural safeguards accorded to criminals such as fair procedures, the proportionality of the punishment to the crime, or judicial review. Hence, despite denied punitive connections, detaining migrants exerts punitive power over detainees by confining them to the status of "legal non-personhood" with no access to law (De Genova, 2016, p. 4), and perpetuates criminality by suggesting that those detained are criminals from whom the public should be protected (Bourbeau, 2019).

The literature indicates that the prospect of indefinite detention and unannounced transfers between detention facilities (Gill, 2009) serve a disciplinary function in detention centres (De Genova, 2021) that is often characterised by waiting, loneliness (Griffiths, 2013), and mental health issues (Li et al., 2016). Still, except those (Boochani, 2018) who have experienced immigration detention and write how dehumanising rationalities like reducing people to numbers serve a punitive function inside these spaces of confinement, very few have been able to gather data about the operations and effects of power from inside detention centres. Exceptions include Bosworth's (2018) work where the author points to the centrality of national stereotyping in the everyday workings of detention centres and the meaning-making processes of staff about themselves, their work, and detainees. Furthermore, Amit and Lindberg's (2020) work documents conflicting techniques of coercion and over-recording of cases in Israeli, and deliberate ignorance of cases in Danish detention facilities serving a similar symbolic function in both cases, of constituting unwanted mobility as a security threat and the state as the cohesive, moral authority that guards the social order for its citizens.

A developing scholarship (Armenta, 2017; de Noronha, 2019; Garner, 2015; Kalir, 2019; Menjívar, 2021; Menjívar et al., 2018), on the other hand, has made more direct connections with race and the criminalising rationale of immigration control by highlighting policies and measures that establish certain migrant groups as racial others and targeting them through techniques of "denigration, punishment, and banishment" (Bhatia, 2020a, p. 38). This is in line with arguments (Cole, 2009; Fekete, 2001) stressing that not all racism(s) are "colour-coded," and that new forms of racism(s) can be enacted based on a range of identities other than skin colour, including political status, i.e., asylum seeking, religion, or poverty (see also Singh Bhui, 2016; Sivanandan, 2001). For Fekete (2001, p. 24), governments have enabled "new structures of discrimination and, in the process, provided the ideological space in which racism towards asylum seekers becomes culturally acceptable" by politically labelling some migrant groups with negative connotations and by making deterrence of those groups a main policy objective. Drawing insights from this scholarship delineating the logic of how race-making operates in the public domain by differentiating some migrant groups through racialised ideas of "undeservingness" and "illegality" and rendering them "deportable subjects," I focus here on the everydayness of racial experience in sites like detention centres where those deemed "undeserving" and "illegal" are confined.

Throughout the analysis, race is conceived through a social constructivist perspective, that acknowledges "racialized identities are produced, sustained, and sometimes transformed through social beliefs and practices and yet that race is real, as real as anything else in lived experience, with operative effects in the social world" (Alcoff, 1999, p. 17). Racial construction pertains to placing one group below the dominant one, and power is always the key part of this formation by establishing systems of how racialised groups' presence will be organised, perceived, and reacted to (Goldberg, 1993). In that sense, racialised ideas of migrant "undeservingness," "illegality," and "deportability" are central in making race and constituting everydayness of racial experience in sites where the "unwanted" is held and managed, yet race is lived through the body and experienced in everyday encounters with others (Ahmed, 2002). The research draws on the perspectives and experiences of volunteer visitors to British IRCs, who are among the few actors having access to these facilities to explore everyday practices and encounters through which the violence of racialisation is exerted and performed, as well as experienced and contested in the visiting rooms of detention centres. Incorporating visitor perspectives into the analysis both highlights intersubjective dynamics of race-making in detention centres' visiting rooms and provides an

avenue of research that can shed new light on the violence of the detention and deportation regime upon which public knowledge and research remain scant.

The article is divided into five sections. The next section situates the argument within the existing literature on racialised constructions of migrant "undeservingness," "illegality," and "deportability" and outlines the theoretical framework that will inform the analysis. I then explain the methodology and situate myself within the discussions about race and race-making. Findings are separated into two subsections that detail visitors' experiences and interpretations of ways in which detained persons are constituted as objects of control and subjugation, and thereby racialised within everyday workings of detention centres, how race is experienced by various actors, and how actors resist racialised ascriptions that characterise the everyday interactions in detention centres. In the conclusion, I discuss the significance of my findings for debates on race and racism in the immigration detention and deportation system.

2. Racialised Constructions of "Undeservingness" and the Lived Experiences of Racialised Embodiment

As in most Global North countries, the UK government(s) have also foregrounded the distinction between "genuine" refugees and "bogus" asylum seekers in its response to the migration "crisis," and at the centre of much of the public debate has been this opposition between the "deservingness" of refugees and "undeservingness" of asylum seekers or other irregular migrants (Holmes & Castañeda, 2016). The latter group is increasingly associated with "illegality, racketeering, and disregard for sovereign borders" (Harding, 2000, p. 57), and thus excluded from accessing decent employment and welfare, and targeted through criminal justice measures (Hirschler, 2021, pp. 51–94) like policing, surveillance, and detention amongst other everyday practices and processes of bordering (Yuval-Davis et al., 2018). Scholarship in critical migration and border studies (Bhatia, 2020a; de Noronha, 2019; Menjívar, 2021; Provine & Doty, 2011; Walker, 2019) has addressed the racialising effects of those institutionally sanctioned exclusions, and detention has emerged in those analyses as the ultimate spatiotemporal device to govern the "undeserving," "unruly," "illegal" migrants who, by virtue of their detention, "must" have broken the rules and, therefore, "deserve" the punishment.

Today, British detention centres hold bodies that are criminalised simply for being out of the "national order of things" (Malkki, 1995, p. 513), racialised through their reduction to disposable, deportable subjects kept outside the law (De Genova, 2002) and punished (Hasselberg, 2016) although their punishment is being presented as "an utterly routine and mundane recourse of states "holding" (De Genova, 2016, p. 3). Such a formation of power/knowledge constituting its object has been described most compellingly in Foucault's analysis of institutions such as prisons (Foucault, 1977), where power is not always legal in character, organised effectively, or exercised homogeneously across sites, but it produces coherent effects of setting a particular relation with its object by disciplining them into certain capacities, rights, and into a certain recognisable nature. Power is dispersed into multiple networks and works from the bottom-up as much as it is exerted from the top down, and is examined through positive characteristics producing its objects as much as negative or punitive ones (Foucault, 1977). A Foucauldian analysis of power enables attending to the ways in which racialised identification of groups becomes an instrument of the economy of power in sites where those groups are being held, but also to how those ascriptions are resisted by actors involved in those power relations. Therefore, although Foucault himself does not focus on race, his analysis of power is useful in examining race as a "technique of power" making and remaking of the other (and self) through everyday workings of spaces like detention centres where those deemed "illegal" and "undeserving" are held. In this article, I argue that the detained body is the object of the detention centre within which race operates, is reproduced and resignified through everyday workings of the space constituting detained bodies as objects of control and subjugation. Thus, the workings of racist violence can be analysed by attending to how race is experienced in both everyday embodied existence and resistances of actors involved in power relations that characterise detention centres.

A similar perspective can be found in Fanon's (1967, p. 82) account where he analyses the scene in public transportation in France where a white boy points at him saying: "Look, a negro! Dirty nigger!" In this scene Fanon experiences his "otherness" being fixed onto him through his blackness, as something to be frightened of. He feels as if he was an "object in the midst of other objects" (p. 82) identified via a white boy's fearful gaze and cries, and he goes on to describe it as "non-being'' or a "being through others" (p. 82). Fanon suggests that his access to or experience of blackness is filtered through whites constructing him as a physiological self, localising him and calling him a name. He provides a detailed account of violent processes of othering experienced through a body that is objectified and controlled by the white gaze that reinscribes racialised difference in and through everyday micro-interactional dynamics. Those experiences often generate bodily reactions such as anger and anxiety felt by victims of racist violence, and, much in the same way, fear and disgust are felt by those exposed to racialised moral panic (Bonilla-Silva, 2019). In both cases, the body is the key site where racialised meanings are ascribed, experienced and lived. Yet, it is also important to note that such sites of truth or meaning-making may also be sites of resistance to and contestation of established meanings.

In the abovementioned scene, the white boy ascribes blackness to Fanon, thereby exercising domination by

subjecting Fanon to a particular truth that he has no say in. Yet, there are three positions involved in this racialising interaction: the first person (the speaker), who is ascribing the racial qualification; the second person, to whom the racial qualification is ascribed; and the third person who observes and accounts for the racial interaction (Fassin, 2011). This third position is particularly important to investigate the experiences and meanings involved in racialised embodiment as the observer witnesses, narrates, and gives meaning to racialisation either by applying pre-established racial classifications or by proposing new meanings that might resist racialised ascriptions. Either way, it brings a moral judgement that either degrades or empowers the body being made a "being-for-others" (Fanon, 1967, p. 82) and either way it includes "power over" individuals who are the objects of judgement. Additionally, the presence of a third party makes racialisation performative by revealing the relationship between the subject and the world, thereby providing an interpretive context for the objectification of the body (Ngo, 2017). Surely, actors may engage in intersubjective meaning-making from different embodied positions mediated by their own histories and lived experiences, and therefore, contradictory interpretations may emerge. But this multiplicity may also contribute to forming a coherent understanding of the embodiment of racialisation by revealing relationships and realities that might be unseen, even by the victims of racism or discrimination.

Foregrounding this third position, I examine the interpretations and experiences of volunteer visitors to detention facilities to explore how bodies are racialised within the everyday intersubjective relations that characterise those centres. Following Essed's (2008, p. 448) conception of "everyday racism," which places racism in a relational perspective by highlighting its varied effects depending on subjects' positions within relations of power, I attend to three interlocking processes: (a) that of "the marginalization of those identified as racially different," (b) "the problematization of other cultures and identities," and (c) "symbolic or physical repression through humiliation or violence" to illuminate the varied effects of racialised embodiment and ways in which those effects are being contested. It is important to note here that I am not concerned with the intent or motivation of people exerting control within immigration detention centres, but the workings of power at the level of subjugation and in processes that subject bodies, govern gestures, or dictate behaviour in ways that respond to racialised formulations of detained bodies as "undeserving" and "deportable" subjects. The major concern is to illuminate processes and operations through which objects of the detention system are being made and remade within relations of power specific to detention centres, thereby challenging ideas of race-neutrality of institutions involved in immigration control. The next section details methodological considerations on the research process and analysis.

3. Methodology

The article draws on data collected in 2020 through online, semi-structured interviews with six volunteers visiting multiple detention facilities across the UK for at least 18 months. The method has been useful in collecting the experiences and perspectives of visitors who are located across the country and made the research possible during the course of a global pandemic. The interviews took at least one hour and, beforehand, participants were informed about possible challenges associated with online interviews such as technical problems creating pauses during the interviews and measures they can take to mitigate those challenges. Cognizant of the difficulty of collecting nonverbal cues, or creating intimacy online, I contacted participants several times through email before the interview to ask them questions about themselves and their roles. This outreach aided in building rapport before the interview and helped shape interview questions.

Participants in this study were recruited by seeking administrative consent from the visiting organisations they are registered with. They are selected from two charities (Anonymous Visitors and Anonymous Friends) and one grassroots organisation (Friends of Detainees), with both participants' and organisations' names anonymised for ethical purposes. This selection reflects the diversity of visiting groups in the UK and illuminates the impact of different institutional obligations on the capacities and strategies different groups can develop. For instance, members of the grassroots organisation do not disclose organisational ties when visiting detention centres and this organisation prioritises assigning a visitor of the same nationality/ethnicity who often visits as the detained person's friend or relative. Other groups' access, on the other hand, is enabled through negotiations between visiting organisations' administrators and detention facility management, and visiting group administrators are responsible for incorporating expectations of detention facility management into visitors' training and handbooks outlining the code of conduct.

Participants were asked about their experiences of visiting detention centres and the power dynamics that characterise those spaces. Their accounts have been analysed with an interpretive lens by foregrounding processes and practices that subjugate bodies within detention centres, but also focusing on questions of what do struggles of volunteer visitors say about the workings of power inside detention centres, by whom or from which subject positions those struggles are engaged with, what are their guiding principles, and what are their means. Throughout the analysis, I followed grounded theory methods (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014) and developed thematic explanations by comparing participants' accounts to each other, to the broader context they have referred to and to the codes being used in the analysis. This comparative focus allowed for establishing

connections and contrasts between subject positions, as well as diverse forces of power and resistances involved in the detention system.

I conducted this research and wrote this piece as a female, Turkish postgraduate researcher based in an "elite" UK institution. Whilst this institutional privilege eased access, my ethnic/racial identity has been highlighted by some of the participants as they construct meanings during our interviews. Whether a Turk is white, an East-European, West-Asian, or Middle Eastern is a debate elsewhere (Gökay & Hamourtziadou, 2016), but as a person who looks "white enough," I have been considered white especially by some visitors who embody non-whiteness, whilst some white-British visitors considered me a Muslim-outsider. Those different positionings often generated the need for participants to explain the reasoning behind their interpretations, and it opened up a space of reflection for me.

4. Findings

Findings explore visitors' accounts of visiting detention facilities, interactions they engaged in those facilities, and meanings they draw from those interactions. Drawing on volunteers' interpretations, the analysis highlights everyday practices through which the violence of racialisation is exerted and performed, as well as experienced and contested by various actors inside detention centres.

4.1. Navigating Racialised Relations of Power in the Immigration Removal Centres Visiting Rooms

Most visitors interviewed for this study explained what they do as similar to prison visits but for those who "haven't committed a crime or been to court" (Robyn, Anonymous Visitors), and addressed similarities between prison estates and detention facilities. They expressed their sympathy towards those detained by referring to injustices inflicted on people just because their nationality does not fit the criteria, and some presented religious reasons when asked for their reasons for visiting. Commonly, volunteers visiting detention facilities stressed what they do as "radical listening" to stories of people inside detention centres, of abuse and torture, and of people being re-traumatised inside IRCs. Many mentioned visiting people they describe as "suffering," having mental health issues including "anxiety," engaging in forms of self-harm including "suicide attempts," and reflected on the deteriorating state of detainees' mental health during the term of their confinement. One visitor explained in frustration that "all they are being given is paracetamol" (Lianne, Anonymous Friends) and maintained that detained persons are neither able to access proper health care nor legal support.

Alongside the stories of psychological and physical abuse, visitors mentioned bearing witness to some of the technologies being used against detained persons such as not heating the "cells" during winter, even though the visiting area was heated. However, all of them stressed that an official complaint was never an option if they wanted to continue visiting. Most mentioned taking issues to the administrators of their visiting organisations and hoping their administrators resolve it with the detention centre management. Visitors' accounts underlined some of the new configurations of punishment (Aas, 2014; Bosworth, 2012) that might emerge in spaces like detention centres where a government deflects responsibility to private companies, placing those who are "to be disposed of" at the mercy of authorities responsible for their management (De Genova, 2016). Whilst the involvement of private companies in the management of "unwanted" bodies allows the state to avoid unpleasant and potentially aggressive implementation of the policy, those companies guided by macroeconomic concerns such as cost-effectiveness or performance often perform state violence through negligence and abandonment (Menz, 2013). Companies perpetuate the restrictive policy direction by constantly responding to it, and the state grants them spaces of expansion for further monetary accumulation. In that sense, detention centres operate in a legal grey zone that lacks scrutiny and accountability, where capital and sovereign state manage detained bodies as a resource for their overlapping interests. With these concerns in mind, many visitors explained their motivation as to "check-in in spaces where there is no accountability" (Lianne, Anonymous Friends) and stressed that they are worried because detainees "will be even more invisible" if people don't visit them. Their accounts underline the way exclusion from basic rights and services reconstitutes detained persons as bodies to be dismissed, and, as the following quote from Anonymous Visitors' Sarah illustrates, those practices are often coupled with harsh treatment inside detention facilities:

> I sense a level of hostility and potential violence, not towards me, but as in a situation when various guards were coming off the wing at the end of their shift and the sheer negative testosterone feeling in these enclosed spaces. They were banging on the door to go out at the end of their shift. It was frightening, not to me personally, but I just thought this has just been on the wings here. You know, I'm not at all surprised by the Brook House Panorama program [see Plomin, 2017].

The majority of visitors stressed feeling a general hostility towards detainees inside detention facilities, but visitors from the grassroots organisation who share the same ethnicity as the person they visit expressed that hostility was also being directed at them. From Friends of Detainees, Meaghan's experience is one such case where she made connections to sexism and racism when explaining the hostility she experienced that was distressing her during her visits. She remarked hearing a lot of

condescending expressions in her interactions with staff and framed the gaze of male staff as a source of harm. She explained that the way staff "stare" or "smirk" at her often makes her feel "intimidated" and, by connecting with me on the basis of our shared gender identity, maintained that:

> I think you, as a woman, too would probably understand, you can't really report anything unofficial because they didn't explicitly say anything to harass you or there wasn't hard evidence that they….But it was just more of a dynamic in that space that made me uncomfortable.

She, then, reminding me of our differing racial identities explained why she takes long pauses and adjusts her tone of voice when talking to staff, even if she always gets passive-aggressive responses, or why she is scared to react in her interactions with staff. She described feeling that staff project racialised ideas of "undeservingness" and "illegality" inscribed onto detained bodies onto her body as well, thereby transforming her into an object of suspicion, and also pity:

> I feel like [staff] thought we are like relatives or you know or a couple…but if, let's say, you are visiting my detainee I think the whole dynamic would also be different….I think generally it might be advancing their stereotype of the foreign, you know, foreign people visiting other foreign people in trouble because you know, they came into our country "illegally."

When white-British volunteers are asked a similar question, they often refrained from connecting it to race and racism; some victimised the detention staff and some raised their doubts by saying those held in detention facilities "might-be" criminals, aligning with the "crimmigration" rationale. They addressed the logic differentiating those outside from inside, "us vs. them" (Anderson, 2013), in explaining how detention staff understand their work as "doing something to help people" and maintained that they felt "like some of the staff are [also] anxious about anger, about keeping control….So when they're like that, when they're tense…you don't want to make them worse" (Robyn, Anonymous Visitors). Participants' accounts resonated with research on detention staff elsewhere (Amit & Lindberg, 2020; Borrelli, 2021) where "street-level bureaucrats"(Lipsky, 2010) of detention and deportation policy respond to the policy both in physical terms by establishing a coercive environment, but also by acting on and re-enacting categories of exclusion through everyday practices. Without much clarity on role expectations, these officers exercise a great deal of discretion and they rely heavily on informal "training-on-the job and peer exchange" (Borrelli, 2021, p. 593) that aid in managing tasks by enabling a shared understanding and meaning-making strategies. However, those informal education processes may also be based on racialised ideas that are aligned with the "racialized and exclusionary logics" of the law and policies (Kalir, 2019, p. 32) and therefore, regardless of whether those officers bear racist animosity or not, racist violence is exercised through assumptions they hold as they engage in daily practices and gets approved within the "social life" of detention and deportation regimes.

The interviews reflected two distinct ways of explaining the violence and oppression embedded in the everyday functioning of British detention centres: on one side, the group of volunteers who are (mostly) non-British and people of colour who have experienced racism before, therefore being able to recognise racism and race-making inside detention facilities; on the other, white-British volunteers who made (almost) no reference to racism in explaining the power dynamics characterising the space. What is common sense for one group was not there for the other; although perhaps the parameters structuring the racialised violence experienced by some visitors were different than those being experienced by detained persons. But the focus here is not to look for objective similarities in the effects of race, but to capture "multiple manifestations and hidden epistemic effects of how race is lived and its power over collective imaginations" (Alcoff, 1999, p. 15), in particular how detained bodies are imagined and managed in detention centres. The racial experiences some visitors reflect on are linked to their historical experiences of British colonisation, socio-economic structures that marginalise them, and cultural practices of exclusion, yet for detained migrants, it is linked to the carceral formation of the detention system confining and managing people as objects of subjugation, and bodies to be dismissed. Although the context that determines the content and political meaning of the racial concept is different for different groups, political and historical sensitivity towards racism and how it presents itself in relation to groups that are negatively labelled in society enabled interpretive schemas that some visitors tapped into when making sense of their visiting experiences and perceptions of racialised interactions in the visiting room.

Despite some participants not making direct reference to race and racism, this did not mean that practices and processes of racial meaning-making were absent in their accounts. On the contrary, their accounts also underscored processes of race-making that organise interactions in IRC visiting rooms. As they reflect on their experiences of visiting detention centres, they commonly pointed to a state of alert that characterise routine practices of the visiting room, but also underscored arbitrariness in how those facilities, and therefore detained persons, are being managed. Most participants have reflected on "unreasonable" punitive conditions through which detained persons' "illegality" is being signified in the visiting room such as not allowing phones or pen and paper into the visiting space, not moving any chairs or tables (which was a great challenge for group visits), staff circling around their table, listening to conversations

even if they don't understand the language being spoken, or interrogating visitors about the person they visit although they have no right to do so. Participants also added that different practices might be allowed at different times or in different detention centres depending on which detention staff is on duty and what their "mood" is on that day.

Bryan (Friends of Detainees), who has visited several detention facilities, emphasised that staff exercise an "almost discretionary" power inside the space controlling movement, material, information, and affect. For many visitors interviewed for this study, this "discretionary" power determines the duration of or what is allowed in that visit, therefore impacting their ability to prepare for and the quality of time they could have with the detained person. Many expressed feeling like the interaction they might have with the detained person they visit is heavily dependent on staff, and mentioned cases where staff ends their visit abruptly because they are suspicious about the conversation. They reflected on the impossibility of establishing rapport when staff eavesdrops on conversations, coming into close proximity with the detained person, or collecting information that might be used to in supporting detainees in their casework if staff is not "lenient" that day. Yet for others, the staff's unchecked power manifested itself more strongly in letting the detainee into the visiting room or not. Robyn from Anonymous Visitors reflected on that, by saying:

> When they call people to come to the visiting room you can't be sure if they are using the right pronunciation of somebody's name or you never know whether they have called them or haven't they, what happened or why isn't the person coming you know, what's going on.

Most visitors expressed their frustration over people being deported without any notice or information being given to anyone, including visitors, therefore not being able to have "some sort of conclusion" (Bryan, Friends of Detainees) to their support for the person they visit over extensive periods. As the phones being given to detained persons are taken away as they are deported or transferred to another facility, visitors often lose contact with the person they visit. Some visitors expressed their anger due to deportations taking place on public holidays such as Christmas by saying: "Obviously the Home Office thinks this is a good time to deport somebody because it's very difficult to get to the lawyer" (Tylar, Anonymous Friends). Visitors' accounts pointed to the penetration of uncertainty, which is a key aspect characterising detained lives (De Genova, 2021; Turnbull, 2016) into relationships and interactions detained persons might have inside detention centres. With abrupt deportations or transfers, detained persons are constituted as bodies that disappear seamlessly and are transformed into objects with whom no lasting relationship can be built.

For most visitors, witnessing discomforting scenes that subjugate detained persons, and being unable to "change anything in that space" often activated adverse affects such as anger and frustration. But especially those registered with charities stressed their frustration even more as they reflected on institutional rules and regulations of visiting organisations that are designed to increase efficiency and order as factors contributing to oppression. The rules and expectations pertaining to detention visiting are neither made explicit in the statute nor in the policy setting the rules and procedures. Conditions for visiting are rather enforced by the IRC management in a way to sustain political silence over detainees and detention harms. Visiting organisations are banned from any type of political engagement including seeking publicity, making social media posts, participating in protests related to immigration detention, or making complaints about the detention staff. Some visitors also mentioned receiving warnings from their organisation not to engage in further action for the person they visit if the visiting organisation thinks it might jeopardise their access.

Visitors' accounts pointed to a particular "power geometry" that IRCs illustrate within which "some people are more in charge than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it" (Massey, 1991, p. 26). Detainees are included in these power dynamics as objects of subjugation through their "illegality" and "disposability," detention staff are positioned within it as official and legal actors able to make rules or ignore them, and visitors as legal but unofficial actors. Taking racial/ethnic differences of visitors into account showed that race is indeed an important factor in this geometry. Whilst non-white visitors are placed lower within hierarchies of oppression, racism is naturalised within the relational dynamics of detention centres. However, power is also embedded in relations between visitors and detained persons, as well as being expressed in their relations with detention staff. Visitor-detainee relationships might indeed generate dependency and hence, might perpetuate the subordination of detained persons if the visitor is always placed on the providing end of the relationship and the detainee is always on the receiving end. Again, despite all good intentions, visitors abiding by the silencing logic operating in detention centres and addressing the suffering of detained persons without holding much of a prospect for change might indeed contribute to racialised relations of subjugation and reproduce relations of domination.

4.2. "Resisting the Spirit of the Place"

Against the camp-like rationale operating in detention centres that keep detained persons invisible and muted in remote areas by confining them into an existence defined by "illegality" and "undeservingness," visitors

often stressed that they aimed to show detainees that "people care about them, and they matter" (Robyn, Anonymous Visitors). Most visitors explained they aim for establishing "humane contact" with detained persons not just by offering them space and a "befriender" to talk with as they need, but also by building a relationship of trust. Some mentioned that they continued visiting the same person even after they are transferred to another IRC, offering social links if they are released, or writing to the families of detained persons "to make [them] feel he wasn't alone" (Robyn, Anonymous Visitors).

In addition to practical support visiting organisations offer such as money or topping up SIM cards, visitors mentioned they try to connect detainees with the "outside world" by bringing books, magazines, CDs, or clothes to them and by providing them with connections to other organisations and human rights networks. Although most expressed they can only do "small things" that do not solve the problems of detained persons, it is possible to regard those acts as forms of political action through which they resist racialising dynamics of power that characterise detention centres. Despite being constrained in their capacities and conduct, most visitors mentioned that they aim for fostering an "allyship" (Kelly, Anonymous Friends; Brian, Friends of Detainees) with the person they visit and mitigate the effects of isolation that the detention system inflicts on people. Some reflected on material and symbolic repression that characterise British IRCs and mentioned that they create "a mental space" (Meaghan, Friends of Detainees) with the person they visit where they don't fight the guards but they "resist the spirit of the place" (Sarah, Anonymous Visitors) together. Others addressed the cumulative effects of racist injuries being inflicted on detained persons that cause low self-esteem and people "giving up on themselves," and mentioned their efforts to "nudge" detainees to achieve more after their release by reminding them of their capacities and worth outside the detention system.

Against the unpredictability and uncertainty that function as a form of punishment inside detention centres, visitors think their continued presence can "give their [detainees'] life a bit of normality and structure" (Bryan, Friends of Detainees), but more importantly, it allows visitors to "bear witness" to the harms being inflicted on detained persons. Some participants mentioned they will give testimonies in the first-ever public inquiry launched to investigate the allegations of physical and psychological abuse that took place in Brook House IRC where visitors' accounts will contribute to the case establishing detainee abuse as a public concern. Perhaps, here as well, visitors' accounts reflect their embodied positions, generating differences in perceptions about varied forms of everyday racism that confine detained bodies into a particular subjective existence.

Overall, visitors' accounts pointed to the embodied, affective, and experiential realities of the IRCs that are shaped by intersubjective relations involved in the space, as well as racialised identification and management of detained persons as "undeserving" and "dangerous" bodies. Against the exclusionary and subjugating logic of the detention system that reduces detained persons to a bodily existence via various techniques including denying them contact with the outside world, actors find various tactics to enact new ways of being, especially by being together.

5. Conclusion

This article discussed various ways in which race and race-making operate in everyday workings and interactions that characterise British detention facilities. Grounded on a social constructivist understanding, it argued that racialisation in the detention and deportation system occurs through sociological coding of detained persons' as "undeserving" and "deportable subjects" without access to the law. This formation is exercised and performed through the everyday workings of the detention and deportation system, and experienced and resisted by actors involved in it. Drawing on experiences and perspectives of volunteers visiting various detention centres across the UK, findings revealed some of the practices and processes that characterise social relations of the IRC visiting rooms such as suspicious gazes, ever-changing punitive measures, normalisation of the violent atmosphere, and arbitrary exercise of power that constitute detained persons as objects of control and subjugation. Here, incorporating race and racial perceptions of visitors into the analysis has enabled addressing the influence of subject positions and sensitivities of visitors in their ability to identify race-making processes and practices inside detention centres, and revealed some of the "bodily experiences, subjectivities, judgements, and epistemic relationships" (Alcoff, 1999, p. 17) through which race is made and lived. Whether they have recognised the violence of the detention and deportation regime in its connection to race and racism or not, participants commonly underlined the centrality of politically established ideas of migrant "undeservingness" and "illegality" in describing how detained persons are imagined and managed in detention facilities. In that regard, findings echoed studies (Amit & Lindberg, 2020; Bhatia, 2020b) on detention centres by illustrating that coercion and abandonment work in tandem in managing "unwanted" bodies in British detention facilities. Violence is exercised by the street-level bureaucrats of the policy that is racist in essence, and whilst harm is being done within mundane workings and interactions that characterise detention centres, racialised relations of domination, subjugation and violence often remain unchecked under the veil of race neutrality of institutions.

Contributing to the studies (Bosworth, 2019; Lindberg, 2022) detailing emotions and attitudes of officers implementing detention and deportation policies, this study provides insights into the racial affect

that is experienced and resisted differently by actors involved in relations of power characterising detention centres. More research with same ethnicity/race visitors of detained persons will contribute to this understanding, but more importantly, research addressing detained persons' experiences of and resistances to race and racism is needed to shed better light on operations of race and how it shapes everyday interactions and relations in those sites of abuse.

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

References

Aas, K. F. (2014). Bordered penality: Precarious membership and abnormal justice. *Punishment and Society*, *16*(5), 520–541.

Ahmed, S. (2002). Racialized bodies. In M. Evans & E. Lee (Eds.), *Real bodies: A sociological introduction* (pp. 46–64). Palgrave Macmillan.

Alcoff, L. M. (1999). Towards a phenomenology of racial embodiment. *Radical Philosophy*, *95*(June), 15–26.

Aliverti, A. (2012). Making people criminal: The role of the criminal law in immigration enforcement. *Theoretical Criminology*, *16*(4), 417–434.

Amit, I., & Lindberg, A. (2020). Performing states of crisis: Exploring migration detention in Israel and Denmark. *Patterns of Prejudice*, *54*(3), 238–257.

Anderson, B. (2013). *Us & them? The dangerous politics of immigration control*. Oxford University Press.

Armenta, A. (2017). Racializing crimmigration: Structural racism, colorblindness, and the institutional production of immigrant criminality. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, *3*(1), 82–95.

Plomin, J. (Director). (2017, September 4). Undercover: Britain's immigration secrets (Season 65, Episode 32) [TV series episode]. In BBC (Productions), *Panorama*.

Bhatia, M. (2020a). Crimmigration, imprisonment and racist violence: Narratives of people seeking asylum in Great Britain. *Journal of Sociology*, *56*(1), 36–52.

Bhatia, M. (2020b). The permission to be cruel: Street-level bureaucrats and harms against people seeking asylum. *Critical Criminology*, *28*(2), 277–292.

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2019). Feeling race: Theorizing the racial economy of emotions. *American Sociological Review*, *84*(1), 1–25.

Boochani, B. (2018). *No friend but the mountains: Writing from Manus prison*. Picador.

Borrelli, L. M. (2021). The border inside: Organizational socialization of street-level bureaucrats in the European migration regime. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, *36*(4), 579–598.

Bosworth, M. (2012). Subjectivity and identity in detention: Punishment and society in a global age. *Theoretical Criminology*, *16*(2), 123–140.

Bosworth, M. (2018). "Working in this place turns you racist": Staff, race, and power in detention. In M. Bosworth, A. Parmar, & Y. Vázquez (Eds.), *Race, criminal justice, and migration control: Enforcing the boundaries of belonging* (pp. 214–228).

Bosworth, M. (2019). Affect and authority in immigration detention. *Punishment & Society*, *21*(5), 542–559.

Bosworth, M., & Turnbull, S. (2014). Immigration detention, punishment and the criminalization of migration. In S. Pickering & J. Ham (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook on crime and international migration* (pp. 91–106). Routledge.

Bourbeau, P. (2019). Detention and immigration: Practices, crimmigration, and norms. *Migration Studies*, *7*(1), 83–99.

Cole, M. (2009). A plethora of "suitable enemies": British racism at the dawn of the twenty-first century. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *32*(9), 1671–1685.

De Genova, N. (2002). Migrant "illegality" and deportability in everyday life. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *31*(1), 419–447.

De Genova, N. (2016). Detention, deportation, and waiting: Toward a theory of migrant detainability. *Gender and Research*, *20*(1), 92–104.

De Genova, N. (2021). "Doin" hard time on planet earth: Migrant detainability, disciplinary power and te disposability of life. In C. M. Jacobsen, M.-A. Karlsen, & S. Khosravi (Eds.), *Waiting and the temporalities of irregular migration* (pp. 186–202). Routledge.

de Noronha, L. (2019). Deportation, racism and multi-status Britain: Immigration control and the production of race in the present. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *42*(14), 2413–2430.

Essed, P. (2008). Everyday racism. In J. H. Moore (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of race & racism* (Volume 1; pp. 447–449). Palgrave Macmillan.

Fanon, F. (1967). *Black skin, white masks*. Pluto Press.

Fassin, D. (2011). Racialization: To do races with bodies. In F. E. Mascia-Lees (Ed.), *A companion to the anthropology of the body and embodiment* (pp. 419–434). Wiley-Blackwell.

Fekete, L. (2001). The emergence of xeno-racism. *Race and Class*, *43*(2), 23–40.

Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Vintage Books.

Garner, S. (2015). Crimmigration: When criminology (nearly) met the sociology of race and ethnicity. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, *1*(1), 198–203.

Gill, N. (2009). Governmental mobility: The power effects of the movement of detained asylum seekers around Britain's detention estate. *Political Geography*, *28*(3), 186–196.

Gökay, B., & Hamourtziadou, L. (2016). "Whiter than white": Race and otherness in Turkish and Greek national identities. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, *18*(2), 177–189.

Goldberg, D. (1993). *Racist culture*. Blackwell Publishing.

Griffiths, M. (2013). Living with uncertainty. *Journal of Legal Anthropology*, *1*(3), 263–286.

Harding, J. (2000). Double indemnity. *Index on Censorship*, *29*(5), 54–58.

Hasselberg, I. (2016). *Enduring uncertainty: Deportation, punishment and everyday life*. Berghahn Books.

Hirschler, S. A. (2021). *Hostile homes: Violence, Harm and the marketisation of UK asylum housing*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Holmes, S. M., & Castañeda, H. (2016). Representing the "European refugee crisis" in Germany and beyond: Deservingness and difference, life and death. *American Ethnologist*, *43*(1), 12–24.

Kalir, B. (2019). Departheid: The draconian governance of illegalized migrants in western states. *Conflict and Society*, *5*(1), 19–40.

Lindberg, A. (2022). Feeling difference: Race, migration, and the affective infrastructure of a Danish detention camp. *Incarceration*, *3*(1).

Lipsky, M. (2010). *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services*. SAGE.

Mainwaring, C., & Silverman, S. J. (2017). Detention-as-spectacle. *International Political Sociology*, *11*(1), 21–38.

Malkki, L. H. (1995). Refugees and exile: From "refugee studies" to the national order of things. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *24*(1), 493–523.

Malloch, M. S., & Stanley, E. (2005). The detention of asylum seekers in the UK. *Punishment & Society*, *7*(1), 53–71.

Massey, D. (1991). A global sense of place. *Marxism Today*, *June*, 24–29.

Menjívar, C. (2021). The racialization of "illegality." *Daedalus*, *150*(2), 91–105.

Menjívar, C., Gómez Cervantes, A., & Alvord, D. (2018). The expansion of "crimmigration," mass detention, and deportation. *Sociology Compass*, *12*(4).

Menz, G. (2013). The neoliberalized state and the growth of the migration. In T. Gammeltoft-Hansen & N. N. Sørensen (Eds.), *The migration industry and the commercialization of international migration* (pp. 108–128). Routledge.

Ngo, H. (2017). *The habits of racism: The phenomenology of racism and racialized embodiment*. Lexington Books.

Provine, D. M., & Doty, R. L. (2011). The criminalization of immigrants as a racial project. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, *27*(3), 261–277.

Sales, R. (2002). The deserving and the undeserving? Refugees, asylum seekers and welfare in Britain. *Critical Social Policy*, *22*(3), 456–478.

Schuster, L. (2005). A sledgehammer to crack a nut: Deportation, detention and dispersal in Europe. *Social Policy and Administration*, *39*(6), 606–621.

Singh Bhui, H. (2016). The place of "race" in understanding immigration control and the detention of foreign nationals. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, *16*(3), 267–285.

Sivanandan, A. (2001). Poverty is the new Black. *Race & Class*, *43*(2).

Thornberg, R., & Charmaz, K. (2014). Grounded theory and theoretical coding. In U. Flick (Ed.), The *SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 153–169). SAGE.

Turnbull, S. (2016). "Stuck in the middle": Waiting and uncertainty in immigration detention. *Time & Society*, *25*(1), 61–79.

Turnbull, S. (2017). Immigration detention and the racialized governance of illegality in the United Kingdom. *Social Justice*, *44*(1), 142–164.

Walker, S. (2019). Detention and its discontents: Punishment and compliance within the UK detention estate through the lens of the withdrawal of assisted voluntary return. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *45*(13), 2348–2365.

Webber, F. (2019). On the creation of the UK's "hostile environment." *Race & Class*, *60*(4), 76–87.

Yuval-Davis, N., Wemyss, G., & Cassidy, K. (2018). Everyday bordering, belonging and the reorientation of british immigration legislation. *Sociology*, *52*(2), 228–244.

About the Author

Oyku Hazal Tural is a PhD candidate at the School of Social and Political Science at the University of Edinburgh where she also works as a tutor and research assistant. Her research lies at the intersection of immigration control and humanitarianism, with a particular focus on relationships based on care and compassion in contexts of displacement and refugee resettlement. Her current PhD research concerns developing a socio-legally situated understanding of community-support practices for refugees and asylum seekers resettled in Glasgow, Scotland.