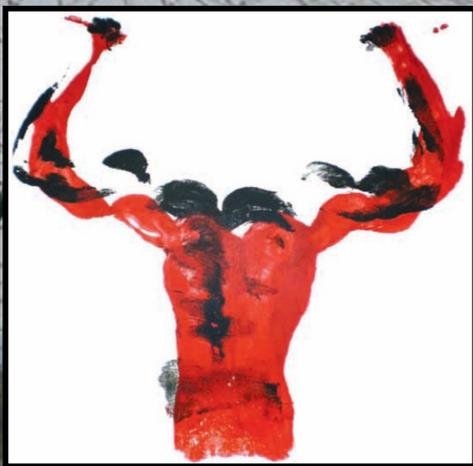


(Im)mobile masculinities at the border: identity, power and personal relations in UK Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs)



Artwork by Brook House detainee Ridy

source: gatwick detainees welfare group



Immigration removal centres in the UK

source: mary bosworth



Brook House IRC

source: crawley/news

3000 people are held in the 10, mostly privately run UK IRCs at any one time (Bosworth, 2014), making it 'one of the largest networks of immigration detention facilities in Europe' (Silverman and Hajela, 2014)

The UK has seen a dramatic increase in the use of indefinite immigration detention over the last 20 years (Gibney, 2008) with further expansion of the detention estate continuing rapidly (AVID, 2014)

Most UK IRCs only hold men (Griffiths, 2015) and 83% of those detained in 2013 were male (Home Office, 2013)

Feminist geography and gender

- Rather than simply denoting sex as a dichotomous, fixed and ontologically given variable, gender is a 'relational...spatially and temporally contextual' process that intersects with other dimensions of power and must be explored as a central analytical concept (Donato et al., 2006).
- Emphasises the socio-political nature of scale, place and space. This 'spatial politics', is vital to 'uncovering the ways in which identities and places are being transformed and reconnected, positioning people within new patterns, or geometries, of inclusion and exclusion' (McDowell, 1999).

Masculinities

- Connell's (1995) four 'patterns' of masculinity: hegemony, complicity, subordination and marginalisation.
- By showing that there was more than one way of being a man, that men could adopt different configurations of practice at different moments, and that these configurations were tied to authority and intersectional social power, Connell demonstrated that gendered power operates within, as well as between the sexes, and that masculinities are fraught with internal contradictions and contestations. (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

Aims and scope

- Better understand the under-researched terrains of masculinity and immigration detention in the UK
- Explore the complex, intersectional and multiscale gendered dynamics of identity, power and personal relations that operate in these hidden carceral spaces
- Expand understandings of gender, transnational migration and belonging
- Examine how everyday lived experiences in detention, while central gendered phenomena for analysis in their own right, are tied to broader issues around state power such as exclusion, border control, asylum, deportation, citizenship, social justice and the international securitisation of migration
- Combine and develop recent knowledge and theory on masculinities and detention together with the gendered geographies of power framework
- Inform and aid support and lobbying work by working collaboratively with NGOs

Academic context and theoretical framework

Gendered geographies of power

(Mahler and Pessar, 2001)

- 'a strong conceptual framework for integrating theories of gender into studies of transnational migration' (Silvey, 2004), bringing together space, time, structure and agency to map the dynamics of gendered relations across migratory journeys.
- Three central tenets: a) gender operates 'simultaneously on multiple spatial and social scales'. b) people are situated at various fluid 'social locations' based on multiple axes of differentiation within these scales. c) careful attention to 'the types and degrees of [corporeal and cognitive] agency people exhibit given their social locations'.

Immigration detention

- The recent body of work on detention from a range of disciplinary perspectives has tended to problematise state power and resistance e.g. Hall (2012) considers IRCs in the broader context of the securitisation of migration by combining Foucault's concepts of governmentality and biopower with Agamben's notions of sovereignty, 'bare life' and the state of exception to demonstrate complex and continuous struggles to produce and reproduce power.
- Small but growing body of work on more nuanced and gendered approaches to detention and gender, and a handful of scholars now working on detention and masculinities.

"What's happened to me", he thought.

It was no dream (Franz Kafka, The Metamorphosis)

Research questions

1. What are the effects of the detention experience on gendered identities and power relations for migrant men?
 - a) Is detention a special space where gendered identities and relations are challenged, reaffirmed or renegotiated? And if so, how?
 - b) How do gendered processes at the scale of the Immigration Removal Centre relate to processes at other scales such as the state, the body, international border regimes, the workplace and the household?
 - c) How do the intersectional factors of class, "race", ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, religion, language etc interplay with gender?
2. How do men respond to these processes?
 - a) How does being in detention affect practices and performances of masculinity?
 - b) How do men utilise varying degrees and types of corporeal and cognitive agency?
 - c) What is the significance of recognition and acknowledgement?
 - d) Are men able to resist processes of subordination and marginalisation?
 - e) Does the detention experience have lasting effects on masculinities, and do the differing outcomes of removal and release impact on this?
3. What are the implications of these findings for conceptualising masculinities?
4. What are the implications of these findings for third sector and government policy and practice on detention?

Methodology

- Where?**
1. Inside detention: a) visitors room
b) other spaces within detention centre e.g. living quarters, social spaces, working spaces, leisure spaces
 2. Outside detention: a) UK homes and community spaces of people formerly held in detention
b) countries of return following deportation
- Who?** 40 research participants – mostly detained and formerly detained men but also family members, friends, NGO staff and volunteers, IRC and Home Office staff.
- How?**
1. Access: primary gatekeepers will be NGOs but may also include academics, my existing networks, Home Office, IRC management companies.
 2. Methods: a) qualitative mixed-methods approach, open ended, inductive
b) semi-structured and life story interviews (face-to-face and telephone), participant observation, diaries and focus groups
c) participatory approach including use of steering group

Positionality and ethics: Since people may experience detention as profoundly disempowering and distressing (Griffiths, 2015), reflexive scrutiny of the research process as well as attention to the interplay of subjectivities will be vital. Ethical procedures will be developed to prevent harm and redress power imbalances.

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