**Same Difference? Researching racism and immigration**

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> "In the sectors we studied—different aspects of employment, housing and
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> the provision of services—there is racial discrimination varying in extent from
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> the massive to the substantial. The experiences of white immigrants, such as
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> Hungarians and Cypriots, compared to black or brown immigrants, such as
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> West Indians and Asians, leave no doubt that the major component in the
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> discrimination is colour" (Daniel, 1968: 209).


That race and racism are deeply entangled in British immigration politics is in part what our

epigram encapsulates. The quotation is from one of the first large studies of "Racial

Discrimination In England" (Daniel, 1968), carried out in the late 1960s. Full of fascinating

insights into the methodological demands of researching post-war immigration, the study

used "colour" discrimination as a proxy for racism that could be separated empirically from

anti-immigrant discrimination. The research used a mix of quantitative and qualitative

methods, including covert "situation tests", where the research team sent people with the

same qualifications but of "different colours and countries of origin to apply for jobs,

houses, mortgages, insurance or hotel rooms…[to] find out what happened to them" (p.20).

The research design assumes an ontology of racism as psycho-social, made up of material

practices and complicated emotions. The researchers argued that those discriminated

against were not always aware of the extent of the racism they were subject to, while

"practising discrimination either caused…some feelings of guilt or at least exposed [those

practising it] to the possibility of censure from certain quarters." (p.25). For the lead

researcher W.W. Daniel, these charged affects of racism could result in dissimulation or pre-emptive apology. The latter, a discursive manoeuvre that was epitomised for the researchers in the wording of housing adverts, "'*Sorry*, no coloureds'." (p.25, emphasis in original).

Today in Britain, direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of race, including colour, ethnicity, national origin or faith, is against the law. Yet, critical accounts attest to the on-going effects of the racist and colonial inflections of immigration policies. At the same time there is a persistent denial by most mainstream politicians that racism is embedded in immigration policies and rhetoric (see Virdee and McGeever, 2018 and Sirriyeh, 2018). Similar – but geographically and historically specific – dynamics can be seen in other countries, including the USA, Australia, and Western Europe (for examples see Galis and Summerton, 2018; Sirriyeh, 2018). For some scholars, and despite variations in contemporary Western European racisms and anti-immigration discourses (El-Tayeb, 2011), the cosmopolitan aspirations of European states has failed to come to terms with the colonial past and pluricultural present (Gilroy, 2004; Bhambra, 2015).

Here, we discuss how empirical research can engage with and intervene in the intimacies between race and immigration discourses. We are mindful of the shape-shifting incarnations of race as a "floating signifier" (Hall, 1996) in British immigration politics (for a review of race and immigration research see Erel *et al*., 2016), and the continuing affective charge of being seen to be racist, that Daniel identified over five decades ago. Our examples come from a recent collaborative multi-method study, "Mapping Immigration Controversy"[1]. Looking specifically at how we worded survey questions and the focus group

method, we show how the methods can produce and/or elicit some of the eerie relations between racism and xenophobia, where the eerie is characterised by "a *failure of absence"*(Fisher, 2016: 61, original emphasis). An example of the eeriness of racism is that the attribution of intent oftentimes relies on speculation. We can be offered hurt innocence or outright denial that racism is at play; "evidence" and "proof" can be difficult to assemble. It is clear to us that the period we were researching to the time of writing is a time marked by a shift towards the normalisation of different modes of hostility, including racism and xenophobia (Venn, 2019) that demands critical empirical investigation.

To better ground these concerns, we will introduce our study, the research questions and the research project as a whole, including some of the concepts that informed our research design. We then discuss (1) how the shaping of survey questions helped us to investigate and also intervene in the holding apart of matters of racism from immigration; and (2) the insights we gleaned from the focus group method. We conclude by reflecting on the role of critical methodologies in the present conjuncture of British race and immigration politics, marked by huge political and economic uncertainty and upheaval.

**The research: Operation Vaken and Mapping Immigration Controversies**

In mid-July 2013, the British Home Office launched "Operation Vaken", a pilot campaign targeting information at irregular immigrants to "encourage" them to leave the country voluntarily (voluntary returns do not incur the increased cost of seeking out individuals for enforced removal). One element of the campaign drew public and media attention: two advertising vans that were driven through six of London's most ethnically diverse boroughs, with a billboard reading: "In the UK illegally? Go Home or Face Arrest". The billboard

included a telephone number to call, a close-up photograph of a border guard's uniformed arm holding handcuffs, and a claim that there were "106 arrests last week in your area". National and local commentators were quick to point out that the injunction *Go Home*, now the strapline of a tax-payer funded advertising campaign, had roots in slogans of the far-right, with *Go Home* being a common racist catcall in the 1970s.

Operation Vaken included an increase in highly visible immigration enforcement checks at train and underground stations, and immigration advice surgeries at community and religious centres. During the same period, the Twitter account of the Home Office—the government department responsible for immigration control—shared images of enforcement raids and individuals being put into the back of secure vans with the hashtag #immigrationoffender, and "There will be no hiding place for illegal immigrants with the new #immigrationbill". The campaign turned out to be short-lived, running for one month (the vans were stopped after two weeks). Vaken caused controversy in the national press and was condemned by the Advertising Standards Authority for using inaccurate information; the Authority found that the claim "106 arrests in your area" was fabricated (Jones et al., 2017).

Not surprisingly, Vaken sparked public and policy conversations on whether immigration policies and rhetoric were racist. The government response to the public renaming of the *Go Home* van as the #RacistVan on Twitter and in some national newspapers, came from the then Minister for Immigration, Mark Harper. Writing in a tabloid newspaper, Harper (2013) described being "astonished" by the reactions of the "Left and pro-immigration industry" that had denounced Vaken as racist. "Let me clear this up once and for all" Harper wrote, "It

is not racist to ask people who are here illegally to leave Britain. It is merely telling them to comply with the law. Our campaign targets illegal immigrants without any discrimination at all between them. By no stretch of the rational imagination can it be described as 'racist'" (n.p.).

At the time of Vaken, we were part of a group of academics and activists who came together to challenge this mode of government public engagement campaigns, which mobilised racist tropes while denying that they were racist. We hoped that as social researchers, we could play a role in stopping such campaigns and contribute to conversations on the dis/articulation of racism and immigration. In this case, we decided to take the minister at his word. Harper's claim was that government campaigns on "illegal immigration" should matter only to those "in the UK illegally". Others should not worry. We began to investigate this rationale by researching the effects of government immigration campaigns on the public.

To develop our research questions, we worked with civil society organisations that were already engaged with the effects of these campaigns, including local migrant support groups and national anti-racist charities. This collaborative working unfolded organically, as we had already made contact with such groups through initial oppositions to Vaken. Through our partnerships, we were able to identify areas where empirical evidence would be of use to anti-racist campaigners. We were also prompted to think outside our comfort zones. A vital perspective that a civil society partner asked us to include in the study was the impact of immigration campaigns on self-identified "white working class" groups, and supporters of

anti-immigration political parties, who were worried about increasing immigration (discussed further below).

In brief, our locality-based research was carried out in partnership with civil society organisations in six areas of the UK. The organisations helped to recruit participants for qualitative interviews and focus groups, and organised local public meetings where we discussed our emerging findings. These local engagements were combined with interviews with national policy-makers, and a large-scale national quantitative survey. In overview, our study consisted of:

- 13 focus groups with 67 people (including new and long-settled migrants, ethnic minority and white British citizens);
- 24 one-to-one interviews with local activists;
- interviews with eight national policy-makers about the intentions and thinking behind immigration enforcement campaigns;
- a survey commissioned from Ipsos MORI that investigated awareness of and attitudes to immigration enforcement. Questions were placed on the Ipsos MORI Omnibus (Capibus) amongst a nationally representative quota sample of 2,424 adults (aged 15 and over). Interviews were conducted face-to-face in respondents' homes between 15 August and 9 September 2014. All data are weighted to the known national profile of adults aged 15+ in Great Britain;
- participation in and documentation of online debates on Twitter about key elements of Vaken and related campaigns, and reactions to them;

- presenting and discussing interim findings with the communities and organisations with whom we had done the initial research, and including their responses in the findings;

- fieldnotes of interviews and ethnographic observation that we used to help us develop more multisensory and reflexive insights.

It is important to point out that methodologically, racism and immigration are considered "sensitive topics" (Brannen, 1988; Lee, 1993; Gunaratnam, 2003). Sensitive topics are those that constitute levels of threat to research participants and/or the researchers. Lee (1993) has identified three main forms of threat: "intrusive", where research investigates issues felt to be private; threat that carries the possibility of sanction; and threat that is political. We encountered all of these types of threat and in varying combinations, depending on who was involved in any particular research interaction. The methodological demand of researching sensitive topics for Lee is how to manage or mitigate threat, "but without compromising the research itself or limiting the overall scope of the research to address important features of contemporary society" (1993:16).


**Fast moving times**

As well as the sensitive nature of our research topics, another methodological challenge was that the campaigns we were studying continued to unfold during the funded project (2013-2015). Despite high profile opposition to Vaken, the drive to immigration communications campaigns by national government (ostensibly targeted at migrants but directed at an audience of the general public) continued. In the following two years, related government initiatives included an increased visibility of branded Home Office immigration enforcement vans carrying out immigration raids throughout the UK; signs in doctors' waiting rooms

declaring "The NHS is not free for everyone", highlighting limited access to "universal" healthcare for some migrants; and press releases and ride-alongs on immigration raids for local and national journalists (Jones *et al.*, 2017).

So our study had to come to grips with a fast-changing political climate. The government's "hostile environment" policies were intensifying (see Hill, 2017; Venn, 2019). Race and immigration were also becoming a central focus of the Brexit referendum debates (Gietel-Baston, 2016) and political campaigning from 2014/5, and in the run-up to the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum. Although we captured initial public responses to Vaken through an unfunded street survey in August 2013[2], most of our research happened months later. The time-lag meant that our methods became quasi-archives, storing, compressing and re-introducing Vaken images and discourses in multiple iterations, against the backdrop of other campaigns. This created new *in situ* affective encounters and responses to Vaken, distanced in space and time from the original events and framed by a more heightened politicisation of immigration.

To better understand the flows between anti-migrant narratives and racism in our project, it is important to say something about contemporary modes of race-making or racialisation and their imbrication with racism and anti-immigrant hostility.

**Racialisation, Racism and Xenologies**

Racialisation or the creating of classifications and interpretive repertoires where race can become a proxy for, be splayed across, or subsume other social differences is not the same as racism. Although the terms can be used interchangeably, some researchers believe that

while the concept of racialisation is helpful in identifying a diversity of race-based narratives, it risks obfuscating the historical and structural underpinnings of racism and white privilege (Song, 2014). In our analysis, we follow Gail Lewis (2007) in recognising the interplay between racialisation and racism. Racialisation becomes racism for Lewis, when "racial categorization acts to define the terms of inclusion in, modes of relation among, and the horizons of the racialized social" (Lewis, 2007: 874).

To address the complexity and fissuring of these relationships, we add two further points. First, the importance of recognising the indeterminacy of race as a category. More than acknowledging categories of race and racism as fluid and situational, indeterminacy flags up the instabilities of race *per se* as a *queer* signifier; that is, how race can fix, blur, breach and subvert categorical distinctions and couplets. Second, we are mindful of recent discussions of the diverse forces and supranational alliances that constitute contemporary nationalisms and right-wing populism (Bhatt, 2012; Puar, 2007). Chetan Bhatt uses the term "new xenologies" to evoke the "complicated assembly of claims associated with civilization, religion, and culture as well as race, ethnicity, and nationalism", suggesting that the word:

> …draws promiscuously from each precisely because older 'racial' and 'cultural' discourses of animosity have become problematic. Xenologies constitute whatever is considered the stranger as an object for politics and they render other political possibilities inconceivable: By 'xenology', we are largely speaking about xenomisia, animosity that is vitalized towards the stranger, hostis as hostility. (2012: 310)

Where anti-immigrant hostility is shuffling and confusing all manner of identities, so that certain bodies are read as being strangers, regardless of citizenship or migration (El-Tayeb, 2011; Tudor, 2017), we suggest that critical social thought does not as yet have a strong sense of how methodologies might themselves not only attune to such dynamics but also intervene in them. This point has been elaborated in the more recent exploration of "Live" (Back and Puwar, 2012) "inventive" (Lury and Wakeford, 2012) and "activist" (Ambikaipaker, 2018) methods. In these approaches, methods are recognised as more than neutral devices for tracing, probing and describing a research problem but are approached as "ways to introduce answerability into a problem" that, "should not leave the problem untouched" (Lury and Wakeford, 2012: 3).

As we will show, our methods also had to take account of the seemingly different, and oftentimes paradoxical ways in which racialisation and xenologies become racism in British government policies and popular narratives. While racialisation can still centre whiteness as normative (Hesse, 1997), we are interested in examining how signifiers of belonging—tied to matters as diverse as skin colour, faith, language, cultural competence and gendered dress—can stand in for, confuse or camouflage race in defining "the terms of inclusion in, modes of relation among, and the horizons of the racialized social" (Lewis, 2007: 874). Anti-immigration rhetoric and hostility, we argue, is enfolded into the terms of national belonging, while overt racism remains socially unacceptable. This distancing is based on two premises. The first is the acknowledgement that the category "immigrant" (and indeed, "asylum seeker" and "refugee") includes people of diverse phenotype, ethnicities and heritage, who cannot therefore be thought of as a single group. Second, is the idea that the nation (in this case Britain) is not ethnically homogenous, and many ethnic minorities and

people with migrant heritage are British; and indeed some of these British citizens can align themselves with anti-immigration policies and rhetoric as recent discussions of what is sometimes called "brown Brexit"—the relatively large numbers of people from South Asian ethnicities who voted to leave the European Union in 2016—have suggested (Ehsan, 2017).

**Topic threat in research**

For some of our migrant, refugee and asylum seeker research participants of colour, the political threat that Vaken posed was read as undeniably racist. Lucee[3], a refugee from Sierra Leone, worried that the *Go Home* vans would exacerbate local "racial tension". In a focus group with asylum seekers and refugees that Hannah facilitated in Bradford in the North of England, Lucee anticipated how immigration publicity campaigns like Vaken could invigorate racism where she lived:

> "there had been a few racist things going on…these are people who
>
> obviously don't care whether I've got my stay or not…every time
>
> they've seen me they've always told me to go back to my country. So
>
> imagine if they saw this they'd probably call them [the Home Office],
>
> pick me up [laughs], do you know?"

We found that those subjected to xenologies and racism were acutely aware of the many ways in which immigration and racism were co-constitutive in political and media discourses and vernacular imaginaries. In similar ways, in a one-to-one activist interview between Yasmin and Amaal, a community worker in Barking in East London, the *Go Home* vans were storied as inflaming racism in the borough. "'Go home', that sentence" Amaal said, "that is the sentence people are really angry about and feel quite violated. If someone says to them

'go home' and for the Government to come up with that … that is a green light for others to use [it] as well."

Consciousness of the imbrications of racism and immigration in everyday narratives had very different effects in our focus groups with supporters of far-right and anti-immigration political parties. In these groups, the topic threat of being seen as racist was somewhat de-jeopardised. Despite qualifications ("I'm not racist, but…), there seemed to be little embarrassment or shame in voicing xenological views and sceptical support for the theatricality of Vaken, where the *Go Home* vans were seen as making local white residents "happy". Because of our mixed-method approach, we were able to further explore these qualitative findings in our survey research. In the survey, we found that attitudes towards immigration control changed when we worded and framed a question to include racial profiling. That is, when we made connections between immigration policing and racism.

**Talking about race and immigration: large-scale survey design**

Overall, respondents to our survey found the implementation of border policing, including in its more violent forms in immigration raids, tolerable or even desirable. Yet, when we asked for their opinions on reports that the checks were being carried out on the basis of skin colour, they did not endorse these types of practices in public places such as train stations. We asked, "Some people have suggested that white people are less likely to be questioned during checks or raids on suspected irregular/illegal immigrants. How acceptable or unacceptable do you think it would be if immigration officers carried out checks on the basis of someone's skin colour?" Responses to the question were significantly different

according to the broad racial categories of "white" and "non-white" used by the survey company to categorise respondents. With this question, the survey found that:

- 60% of the sample said that it was fairly or very unacceptable for immigration officers to carry out checks on the basis of someone's skin colour.

- 24% had no opinion either way on this issue (and 2% said they did not know).

- 14% considered it acceptable.

- 45% (n= 214) of "non-white" and 42% (n=794) of "white" respondents found this "very unacceptable"

- 10% (n=50) of "non-white" and 19% (n=365) of "white" respondents found this "fairly unacceptable"

One interpretation of the finding is that by connecting immigration checks to racism in the wording of the question, we increased the topic threat of respondents showing that they supported racist practices. In this mode of thought, the refusal to mitigate the topic threat of supporting racist practices led to dissimulation and an underreporting of support for the practices. Another interpretation by Gargi Bhattacharyya (2015), offered in the vein of inventive methods, has particular implications for researchers. It suggests that we need to make efforts *not* to disarticulate matters of racism from immigration in research. "Quarantining talk of racism" Bhattacharyya believes, "has the effect of silencing concerns about the racist and violent impact of everyday immigration control" (n.p).

We see such attempts to separate out talk of immigration from racism as an integral part of contemporary rhetorical strategies, named by critical discourse analysts as 'disclaimers' (van Dijk, 1992). Disclaiming racism can take the form of disassociation, distancing, blaming, the

reversal of accusations of racism and more recently, attempts to detoxify the words

"racism/racist" by putting them under semiotic duress, dispersing them into a less

politicised vocabulary. An example of the latter can be seen in calls to replace the word

racism with terms such as discrimination, prejudice, insensitivity (Goodhart, 2014) and racial

self-interest (Kaufmann, 2017). David Goodhart (2014), a British centre-right journalist has

sought to reclassify racism as *extreme* hatred, overlooking its multiplicity. From this

perspective, Goodhart claims that racism has been in decline over several decades, so that

Britain has become "a much more racially open society, if not a post-racial one" (p.251). At

the core of Goodhart's argument is the call for what he sees as greater "race literacy";

clarity and nuance in concepts and terminology, so that a spectrum of hostilities,

insensitivity, prejudice and within-group identifications do not carry the social

stigmatisation that accompanies what is in his view "proper" racism (p.257).

Drawing from the findings of our focus group interviews, we suggest that attention to

disclaiming is a particularly fruitful site for the mapping of the mundane contexts,

trajectories and inter-relations between racialisation, racism and new xenologies. Contrary

to Goodhart, we found that participants *were* race literate and agile in how they used

disclaiming to simultaneously mediate the stigmatisation of being viewed as racist *and*

express racist and xenological views. Because interactions are the key feature of the focus

group method, as we discuss further below, the groups helped us to trace the interpersonal

effects of disclaiming.

**Talking about immigration – Focus Groups**

In our 14 focus groups—held in Barking and Dagenham, Bradford, Cardiff, Glasgow, Ealing and Hounslow, Birmingham and Coventry—we showed local residents photographs of the *Go Home* vans and a Home Office tweet of an "immigration offender" being led into a van. We asked what the images brought to mind and allowed conversations to develop among the group. We chose to use focus groups because they have been seen as reducing topic threat, especially when research participants have something in common. In our study, the commonality was living in the same area, supporting the same political party and/or being a user of a particular community resource. Focus groups are also claimed to be more democratic than one-to-one interviews, because with lesser steering by the facilitator, there are more opportunities for participants to control the topics discussed (Wilkinson 1998; 1999). In practice, we found a tension in our rationale for recruiting focus group participants with shared characteristics in order to lessen topic threat and how the method allows participants to take control of topics. When participants hold racist and xenophobic views, there is less opportunity for these views to be challenged. Indeed, the focus group method might even embolden and normalise the public expression of racism, qualified by disclaiming strategies.

The following extract is from the beginning of a focus group interview with supporters of the far-right, racist British National Party in Dagenham (East London). The transcript shows how race, ethnicity and immigration were introduced by participants early on in the interview and in response to a general opening question, "could you just give me a general idea, a flavour of what it's like to live here?". Alan responded to the question with "Not very nice at all". We join the conversation as it moved quickly to the subject of local parking problems:

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Joe: You have to pay to park out in the front.

Alan: The front, but the service road people are parking down there and because it's an African shop, they all park down there and don't get charged.

Joe: Yeah.

Alan: Well, that's another thing, where I live on S, it was a very close-knit community, but they've built a big wall round it now and it's like being in Colditz, do you know what I mean? But the thing is there's a lot of youngsters that have grown up there while I've been there, children of my friends and they've applied for houses on the estate and the houses have come empty, immigrants have got them and they've had to move out, they've gone to Clacton and other places and it's like you said, there's a lot of the elderly people, when their houses become too big for them, as their families have grown up, they've had to move away, because they've not offered even, they've not offered any smaller houses within the vicinity and the children, as they're growing up are meeting people and getting their own families, they can't stay within their own family, like their mothers and fathers to help them, because all the houses have been snatched up by immigrants.

Joe: That's right, that's right, so it's splitting our families up.

Alan: Yeah.

> Joe: Isn't it? And the council say, oh no, our people get housed first, but they pull the wool over our eyes. We can see what's happening. It's the immigrants that are getting the houses.
>
> Alan: They always say that there's a long waiting list and yet an immigrant can come over here and get a house within a couple of weeks, do you know what I mean?
>
> Joe: Exactly, yes, and a house, not a flat, a house, yeah.

In this conversation, a personal story of parking permits and restrictions becomes part of a highly condensed exchange of meaning on the local effects of race and immigration. The rapid flow of the conversation and turn-taking serves to build shared identifications through moral prescriptions, seemingly about immigration but with slippages into racial categorisation. Because our recruitment of participants was place-based, the groups often elicited talk about the singularities of local histories and multicultural living. What is noteworthy with this group, all supporters of the far-right British National Party, was the level of comfort among the white-British, working-class participants in expressing a range racist and xenophobic views with a middle-class researcher of colour.

For us, the apparent lack of topic threat offers insights into the imbrication of new xenologies and racism. With immigrants it is a fundamental incommensurability of lifestyles and values that was talked about as a problem rather than skin colour; a discursive formation that social scientists have referred to as second-degree, culturalist or neo racism (Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, 1991). Cultural racism can be a way of avoiding the social stigmatisation of being seen as a racist. It is also possible that because Yasmin appeared to be British Asian rather than a recent immigrant, talking through cultural racism

was desensitised. Yet, despite participants belonging to an overtly racist political party, they also used disclaimers,"I'm not racist", which served to anticipate and neutralise social censorship while building rapport that encouraged the further expression of racism. In this instance, the disclaimer was part of a narrative of victimhood wherein "white working class" communities[4] were depicted as being reduced to "nobodies"; a discourse that dovetails with Hochschild's (2016) "strangers in their own land", (a narrative of loss and of being "left behind" among seemingly homogeneous rural white populations who voted for Donald Trump):

> Joe:    I joined the BNP because the council weren't listening to the people in the borough, that was the only people you could join because they won't listen to the local people. If you weren't in favour of Labour you was an outcast and that's the way we got treated, you know?  I've got black people in my family, right? I'm not racist, because when I go to hospital I expect the nurse, whatever colour she is to treat me with kindness. There's a lot of people that's coming in in the last year that's got no charisma at all, they don't even say, if you open a door for them, they don't say thank you.

> Carol: No morals.

> Alan: No bedside manner as they call it.

> Joe:  No bedside manner, no and this is what gets up a lot of peoples noses. You'll be queuing up in the Post Office, I've seen so many people arguing in the Post Office where immigrants just walk in and walk straight up to the desk.

Carol:Straight up, yes.

Joe:   Where there's a line, they don't realise they have rules.

Carol: They do realise, but they think they can always do what they

want.

Alan: They do it in the cars, they chop you up and they think they're

doing the right thing.

Carol: That's it.

Joe:   Yeah.

Alan: It's as though they've never had a driving licence, you know

what I mean? But you know, they have this attitude that they

are the important people and we are second to none.

Carol: We're nobody.


Disclaimers such as "I'm not racist" are a part of a spectrum of conversational strategies. Yasmin Jiwani and John Richardson (2011: 245), drawing from the work of Teun van Dijk, have identified a sub-category of racist "apparent disclaimers". Apparent disclaimers are conversational sleights of hand. They include, "apparent denial" ("I have nothing against immigrants, but …"), apparent concession ("Of course some Muslims are tolerant, but generally…"), apparent empathy ("Of course asylum seekers endure hardships, but …"), apparent ignorance ("Now, I don't know all the facts, but …") and transfer (e.g. "of course I have nothing against them but my customers..."). The transfer strategies that we heard in our focus groups included indirect xenology and racism through ventriloquism: voicing anti-immigrant feelings on behalf of others that proved especially powerful when the person

ventriloquized was from a racially minoritised group. An underlying logic here is that those from racialised minorities cannot be racist.

The following extract is from Jackie, a supporter of the anti-immigration UK Independence Party (UKIP). What is interesting about this exchange is how the indeterminancy of racial signifiers is simultaneously problematised and mobilised, a feature of the new xenologies highlighted by Bhatt (2012). It is a duality that can accommodate an array of political and affective responses and alliances. The excerpt comes at the beginning of the focus group, where Jackie is responding to another participant, who had prefaced her description of the "problems" of Barking (in East London) with the disclaimer "I'm not racist by any means, OK?". For this participant, Barking is a place with "all the immigrants, so we've got Muslims, Asians, Somalis, every race you can think of is now in the borough". The extract below begins with Jackie's response to this description:

> Jackie: Well, back in the 50s you had a lot of immigration from lots of places, but the people that came over then, they had to integrate, they had to work hard, they'd no benefits, nothing was handed out on a plate and now [they] resent this far more than we ever do, because if people see a black face they don't know whether that person's integrated into society, they just are wary of them, whoever they are and they really, really do hate it, because I used to go to an exercise class and there were a lot of them there and they used to talk about it all the time.
>
> Yasmin: So what sort of things did they say?

Jackie: They resented the fact that a lot of them get everything for nothing, that a lot of them get free travel where they didn't until they were over sixty. It's all sorts of things, they just don't like the fact that in their words they're ruining our society, because these people that came over with their families back then to all intents and purposes they're English, because they live the English way of life. They haven't come like the people that have come over now, you've got mosques springing up all over the place. More than that, in our area, we back onto an industrial area and every unit that comes empty, in fact anywhere in this borough it's taken over by the, I use the term loosely, black African churches and the people that come to them, they're busting from all over the place, so they're not local residents and it just doesn't seem there can ever be enough of these places, everything they're trying to take over and that's causing an awful lot of resentment, particularly from the Muslims who can't get somewhere to have as their own, well, they just ask for a community centre at the moment where the council seem to be supporting the African churches and yet they get no revenue from them whatsoever. So that is causing a problem anyway, we've got lots and lots of Eastern Europeans, they make no attempt to speak English and people I've spoken to that are teachers say that causes a huge problem, because if a child, you know, you need to speak to the parent the parent doesn't speak English and so they obviously don't seem to push their children, like the Asians do

definitely, I think a lot of the Africans probably do, but where the

Eastern Europeans don't and the fact that they do not speak

English, they all work for themselves, advertise only Polish workers

or Lithuanian, that is causing a lot of resentment and also they're

nocturnal people, so when you're in bed at night you can hear them

outside having conversations at the top of their voices.

There are many themes in Jackie's narrative. For brevity we highlight the merging and

interchangeability of racial and cultural signifiers, where animosity to recent migrants on

one axis of differentiation is mediated by a valorising of settled migrants and a see-sawing

between being pro and anti-Muslim. "Cultures of racism have frequently, if not always,

scaled and ranked human diversity", Les Back and colleagues have written, "often

conferring the status of 'contingent insiders' on some migrants while unloading hate and

derision on other migration groups" (Back *et al.*, 2012: 139)

Notably, Jackie's neoliberal version of citizenship is one where good/successful/enterprising

immigrants take responsibility for themselves (and their children) and integrate into

communities. It is a familiar narrative that can be found across political parties and media

and public discourses. For example, in a one-to-one interview with an activist in

Birmingham, Kirsten Forkert was told about xenologies across different immigrant and

racially minoritised groups:

I remember going in and it was a corner shop run by an Asian guy, I guess

probably of Pakistani or Bangladeshi heritage, was having a row with a

Somali customer and as she walked out he said, "I fucking hate Somalis."

It is bizarre. I don't know how much of a pain in the arse that woman is

but she wasn't all of Somalia, you can't actually...but it is interesting because

I hear, and not across the board that wouldn't be fair or accurate to say, but

I hear people from second generation migrant communities my age or

younger talking about new migrant communities in much the same way as

my parents spoke about their parents.  It is kind of interesting to me that a

lesson hasn't been learned somehow, you know?


The conversations that we sparked in response to Operation Vaken evoke something of the

tenor, paradoxes and ambivalence of contemporary British racial and immigration

imaginaries. Talking about immigration and immigration control has become a way of

showing knowledge of the terms of national belonging, especially as citizenship and

belonging became more prominent following the referendum "Brexit" vote in June 2016.

For some of our discussants, and sometimes regardless of ethnicity or migrant heritage, to

belong is to be anti-immigrant but not racist. Such public performance of race sensitivity

runs counter to the rationale of the claims made by David Goodhart, "if we are unable to

become more discriminating in the way we talk about discrimination, parts of the

population will become desensitised to the language of racism—or, worse, they will find the

all-encompassing definition of racism so much at odds with their own definition that they

will start to self-identify as racist as a form of protest." (p.257).


Being seen to be racist, we suggest, is still socially unacceptable in Britain, but this does not

mean that racism and its material effects have gone away. Rather, we see the ideological

promiscuity of new xenologies (Bhatt, 2012) as offering capacious spaces of thinking, speaking and acting that are utterly entwined with the complexity and paradoxes of race. This became most palpable to us in the sharing of views in our focus groups, where as researchers we had less control over topics and their framing than in our one-to-one qualitative interviews or survey research.

**Conclusion**

The mixed methods that we used in our study have helped us to discern how racist exclusions, hostility and denigration are produced and performed as a part of xenologies, at the same time that racism is denied or disassociated from in contemporary British immigration politics. And while our quantitative methods allowed us to trace some of the affective aftermath of Vaken, they also allowed us to examine the extents to which methods can be inventive in luring methodologies and empirical materials into posing their own problems (Lury and Wakeford, 2012). As we have pointed out, through our survey, we were able to experiment with the wording of survey questions as an empirical affordance that can be used to support and/or resist the holding separate of racism from immigration discourses that characterises government rhetoric.

Our focus groups offered other insights. Because we wanted to encourage free-flowing dialogue, we exerted less control over the direction and development of conversations. The interactional momentum of focus groups helped us to better understand how xenological and racist discourses are social and situated, in the sense that conversations are located in, but also respond to and anticipate interpersonal and wider political debates and controversies. We were privy to how the everyday material, media and affective landscapes

that our participants inhabited became resources in how the imbrications between racism and xenologies were produced and storied.

More broadly, in the focus groups, we were able to see and hear how the logic of immigration campaigns that we have outlined—that anti-immigration narratives cannot be racist because migrants and refugees are racially diverse and the British nation is multi-racial/multicultural—has extended into the everyday. Some people, who have migrant heritage in living memory themselves, or who are racialised as ethnic minorities and see latter-day immigration as a problem argue that they do not see being part of an ethnic group associated with recent migration, as a social concern (Jones *et al.*, 2017). But they may still see newly arrived migrants, or migrants from particular places, as problems, because of behaviours seen as unsuitable within British life. A simplistic sense of racism (white=good, not-white=bad) is therefore still articulated as wrong, but has been replaced by a more complex and temporalised xenology (integrated/established=good, insular/newer=bad), which because of different migration trajectories and interethnic mixing can realign and settle along more varied lines of ethnicity and national origin.

There is a 'civic task' at stake in how we use our sociological imaginations in social research and analysis Alberto Toscano (2012) has argued. For our research team, this civic task included trying to make visible the interrelations between racism and xenologies, as well as exploring the extent to which research methods can challenge or even displace attempts to depoliticise and recalibrate racism. Some evidence of this first ambition can be seen in the project's contribution quoted in the report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on

Racism on her mission to the UK, in which she directly quotes our work as demonstrating harassment on the basis of immigration status, based on racialising logics (Achiume, 2018).

We hope that our collaborative approach not only produced scholarly knowledge, but also enabled access to this knowledge for those directly affected by immigration control, providing resources for them to build their own engagements. We see this, for example, in a conversation between our co-investigator Sukhwant Dhaliwal and Pragna Patel, Director of Southall Black Sisters (SBS), one of our research partners, which is shared in full in the monograph of our research (Jones *et al.*, 2017: 29-37). On behalf of SBS, a not-for-profit organisation established in 1979 to meet the needs of Black (Asian and African-Caribbean) women, Patel says: "The research enabled the women to see their own experiences as connected to others around the country" (p30), "it gave us space to make the connections"(p.32). Significantly, for Patel, the women's involvement in our project was "part of a process, a continuation of work we were already doing with service users. And after the focus group sessions we continued some of those debates" (p.31). She added that some of the women "eventually went on to speak at public events about their experiences" (p.34).

The role of research "is not to create pacifying knowledge" Toscano writes, but to provide "a realistic estimate of the powers necessary to alter, however minimally, the course of history" (p.68).

**Notes**

1.  The Mapping Immigration Controversy research project ran between 2013 and 2015,

and was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (grant reference ES/L008971/1). The co-investigators were Gargi Bhattacharyya, William Davies, Sukhwant Dhaliwal, Kirsten Forkert, Yasmin Gunaratnam, Emma Jackson, Hannah Jones and Roiyah Saltus.

2. Before the Mapping Immigration Controversy project began, we were also part of a wider team of researchers that conducted a quick-turnaround street survey in response to the *Go Home* van in July and August 2013. See https://aarx.wordpress.com/

3. All the names of our research participants are pseudonyms.

4. A related trope in the UK is one that positions the working class as only white, so that when racist ideas are attributed to "the white working class", white middle classes are without racism (Haylett, 2001).

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