

# 1

## Introduction

To say good-bye is to submit to the will of heaven.

John Berger and Jean Mohr (2010/1975: 36)

‘It’s extreme, scary’, said a woman from Senegal. She was looking at an image of a van carrying a government billboard with the words ‘In the UK illegally? GO HOME OR FACE ARREST’.

Hannah had asked this group of asylum seekers and refugees in Bradford what came to mind when they saw the photograph of the van and its huge billboards (see Figure 1). For the next person to speak, it was the broken promises between a husband and wife. Imagine this, Sara<sup>1</sup> said: in their country he had made her many promises, now she’s alone here, she doesn’t know anything. She does not know about the rules. In this new world her husband is everything. Imagine that her husband beats her and kicks her out. She tries to ask her family for help but they will not let her come back: ‘Where will she live? Where will she go?’

Lucee, a refugee from Sierra Leone, worried that the van would create ‘racial tension’. All foreigners could be stigmatised. In the area 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?’

The van had got Abas thinking about why he had fled Afghanistan to come to England, rather than seeking refuge elsewhere. In his mind’s eye, England was a place where he might be able to continue his education or even get a good job; there was the BBC, and the best newspapers!

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<sup>1</sup> All the interviews were anonymised to protect the privacy of the research participants, so the names used in this book are pseudonyms.



*Figure 1: Go Home van*

That a single image of a government immigration policing campaign can bring up such thoughts and feelings begins to suggest something of the emotional, existential and political textures of contemporary immigration control – the ‘submitting to the will of heaven’ – of which the crossing of national borders and citizenship rights is just one part. For those like Lucee, the Go Home campaign is frightening because it might inflame the hostility and racism that she has already faced in her local community. Sara’s stream of consciousness is deeply gendered; the figures of an aggressive and volatile husband and a host country are almost interchangeable (see also Gunaratnam and Patel, 2015). The questions Sara asked in imagining a homeless and abused wife – ‘Where will she live? Where will she go?’ – when transposed into the contemporary political vocabulary of the nation state can be read as: Who belongs? Who can move and how easily? Who can stay? For how long? And on what terms?

It was questions like this that troubled us when we came together as activist researchers to counter the 2013 Home Office immigration publicity campaign ‘Operation Vaken’, of which the vans discussed in the Bradford focus group were a part. Five months later, and in partnership with civil society organisations in six different areas in England, Scotland and Wales, our funded project, ‘Mapping Immigration Controversy’ (MIC) began. We used multiple methods (ethnographic observation, focus groups, qualitative interviews and a

survey) to research Vaken-related policy and media narratives and associated initiatives. We were especially keen to investigate Vaken's aftermath in local communities.

The moment of the Go Home van seemed to us to be a turning point in the climate of immigration debates – a ratcheting up of anti-migrant feeling to the point where it was possible for a government-sponsored advertisement to use the same hate speech and rhetoric as far-right racists. Sadly, as we finish writing this book in the immediate aftermath of the UK's June 2016 referendum on membership of the European Union, it seems as if the process has gone full circle. In the days immediately following the narrow vote to 'Leave' the EU, after a campaign largely focused on the 'problem' of immigration control, there have been many reports of physical and verbal abuse of migrants and racially minoritised people, linked directly to the Leave vote and to the violating language of the Go Home van. Shazia Awan, a Muslim businesswoman from Caerphilly in Wales and a Remain campaigner in the referendum, was told on Twitter the day after the referendum result 'Great news ... you can pack your bags, you're going home ... BYE THEN' (Staufenberg, 2016). Signs saying 'Leave the EU, No more Polish vermin' were left outside homes and schools in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire (BBC News, 2016). Countless other reports of people – mostly nationals of other EU countries, and British Muslims – being threatened and told they must 'go home now' began to circulate in press and social media reports (Agerholm, 2016; Lyons, 2016; York, 2016).

Before the referendum votes were cast, in the midst of the campaign, the Labour Member of Parliament and pro-refugee campaigner Jo Cox was murdered in a horrifyingly brutal attack. Witnesses reported that Cox's assailant had shouted 'this is for Britain' and 'keep Britain independent' (Boffey and Slawson, 2016). Far from being random statements, these were slogans used by Britain First, a far-right fascist group, which claims to share most of the goals of the right-wing United Kingdom Independence Party (Britain First, n.d.). There are parallels here with how fear of UKIP's popularity was seen by many commentators as the inspiration for the Operation Vaken vans in 2013 (e.g. Merrick, 2013; Syal, 2013). As several of our research participants feared (see especially Chapters 4 and 5), use of increasingly hostile anti-migrant rhetoric in government and mainstream political debate seems to both authorise and fuel such hate-filled outpourings, verbal and physical.

When we began the research for this book we did not know the significance of Operation Vaken, of course. But we were disturbed by the vitriol of government rhetoric and an intensifying public mood of

#### 4 *Go home?*

besiegement (Hage, 2016). These worries were shared by the community organisations with whom we developed and did the research. This way of doing research, collaboratively and with local community partners, developing ‘working knowledges together’ and ‘partially shared imaginaries’ (Suchman, 2012: 52), has helped us to include a variety of perspectives and stories of immigration enforcement, and to explore how ‘the object of study is ultimately mobile and multiply situated’ (Marcus, 1995:102). It has also challenged us to think more critically about the politics of immigration research and knowledge production. How are we contributing to the manner in which immigration is imagined and lived? What part does research play in the circulation and meanings of categories such as the ‘immigrant’, ‘asylum seeker’, ‘refugee’ and ‘British citizen’? How might we produce an anti-racist and feminist ‘situated knowledge’ (Haraway, 1988) in a way that does not reinscribe our research participants into dominant, dehumanising discourses (see Bhavnani, 1993)?

In this chapter we will:

- 1 contextualise the immigration regimes and debates within which our study took place
- 2 describe and discuss the Go Home van and related government communications in relation to broader immigration regimes and practices
- 3 summarise briefly our key findings from the research, which will be developed and elaborated on throughout the book
- 4 outline the approach that we took in the project as activist researchers
- 5 provide an overview of what is in the book.

### **The problem of immigration**

Look at all these borders, foaming at the mouth with bodies broken and desperate.

(Warsan Shire, 2011: 25)

Discussions of immigration and immigration control, securitisation and illegality have become more voluble throughout the research and writing for this book. According to the United Nations Population Fund, in 2015, 244 million people, or 3.3 per cent of the world’s population, lived outside their country of origin, with increasing numbers of people being forcibly displaced as a result of conflict, violence and human rights violations (UNPF, 2016). As we worked

on this manuscript in April 2016, harrowing scenes of what has become known as the Mediterranean ‘refugee’ or ‘migrant crisis’ played out in the media almost daily, as more people fleeing war, violence and poverty in Africa and the Middle East tried to find safety in Europe. Sometimes, these lives have faded from our screens and pages as another spectacle has caught journalistic and public attention, but these dangerous journeys and the trauma and deaths, ‘bodies broken and desperate’, that they entail continue. So far (June 2016), there have been 215,380 ‘arrivals’ to the EU by sea in 2016; 2,868 people were reported as dead or missing on their journey to the EU in the first half of 2016 (UNHCR, 2016a). Others lost at sea go unreported. Of the nearly five million Syrians registered by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, just over 50 per cent were women (UNHCR, 2016b). This new era of migration, which includes more women and children, is characterised for the most vulnerable by ‘necropolitics’. This term was coined by the African philosopher Achille Mbembe (2003) to describe ‘death worlds’, where ‘vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead’ (p. 40).

The growth of harsh new border regimes or what activist Harsha Walia (2013) calls ‘border imperialism’ has been a midwife to the birthing of these death worlds in Europe, not only in the Mediterranean but in planes, lorries and detention camps and centres across the continent. There are three simultaneous, imbricated developments in contemporary border regimes: the deterritorialisation of state sovereignty; a fortification of land-based borders; and the domestication of borders (Rigo, 2005; Walters, 2006; Vaughan-Williams, 2010).

The first is characterised by an outsourcing of border control, especially by those in northern Europe to more southerly nations, as increasing numbers of migrants have been heading to Europe’s southern shores as part of a longer journey to destinations such as Germany, Sweden, France and Britain. Increasingly, richer countries – potential places of sanctuary – require asylum applications to be made from outside their territory (Hyndman and Mountz, 2008). This requirement extends border and migrant management into third countries, as the EU has done at different times with Turkey and Morocco (Wolff, 2008).

Alongside this deterritorialisation, the fortification of state borders can be seen in more aggressive forms of border surveillance and policing, including the building of razor-wire fences, new makeshift detention camps, and the re-establishing of border posts. The latter erodes the Schengen system of open internal borders that has been key to European integration for over two decades.

In a seemingly contradictory but actually complementary move, borders have also come ‘home’, entering into domestic spaces, as citizens are increasingly required to check the visa status of those they live with, work with, and serve. The UK Immigration Act 2014 brought in rules requiring private landlords to satisfy themselves that a tenant’s immigration status is in order, or risk penalties. Since the Asylum and Immigration Act of 1996, employers have been obliged to check that employees meet immigration rules, or face large fines; and the Immigration Act 2016 means that banks will have to check the immigration status of people opening accounts.

Each of these developments requires increased surveillance, documentation and justification for the most basic of everyday transactions. They also make ordinary people – who are unqualified to understand often complex legal immigration documents – liable for the maintenance of border control *inside* a territory. Domesticated bordering increases suspicion and fear of the (potentially irregular) migrant and carries these into everyday personal interactions: if an irregular migrant can trick a landlord or bank clerk or human resources officer turned border guard, these proxy border guards could themselves be punished.

These changes in law and practice are heavily entwined with public feeling and discourse, as our research into performative politics demonstrates throughout the book. As we write, the last twelve months alone have seen huge shifts in what is being said in public and in local debates about migration. Throughout 2015, the press regularly carried sensationalist stories and images of people arriving in, or crossing, Europe to seek refuge. As the Lebanese-Australian anthropologist Ghassan Hage has observed, ‘Hardly any newspaper – whether antagonistic to asylum seekers, such as the Australian *Daily Telegraph* (September 9, 2015), or sympathetic to their plight, such as the *Los Angeles Times* (August 6, 2015) – failed, at least occasionally, to refer to refugees in terms of “flows,” “flood,” and “waves”’ (2016: 39). The then British Prime Minister, David Cameron, talked of ‘a swarm of people coming across the Mediterranean, seeking a better life, wanting to come to Britain’ (BBC, 2015). Others went further: ‘these migrants are like cockroaches ... they are built to survive a nuclear bomb’ wrote a *Sun* journalist (Hopkins, 2015). The potency of such visceral signifiers is that they work to reshape both the object of disgust (the migrant, or those suspected of being migrants) and the person who feels disgust. The circulation and accruing of emotions in this way is what the feminist cultural theorist Sara Ahmed (2004), drawing on the ideas of Karl Marx, calls an ‘affective economy’. For

Ahmed, emotions are understood as a form of capital. They are full of value.

But emotions, for all of their power, can change. A palpable, if perhaps temporary shift, in public and political orientations towards refugees in Britain, took place on Wednesday 2 September 2015. After weeks and months of media coverage of arrivals of people by boat into Europe, a single image seemed to change the register of debate: the photograph of the dead body of three-year-old Syrian Alan Kurdi, washed up on the shores of a Turkish beach. Alan had drowned with his brother, Galip, who was five, and their mother Rehanna, when their boat sank as they tried to reach the Greek island of Kos from Bodrum in Turkey. They had previously applied (unsuccessfully) for asylum in Canada. The image of Alan elicited huge international public and political concern, perhaps because, as the writer Avan Judd Stallard (2016: n.p.) believes, Alan looked so much like a typically middle-class Western boy with ‘his shirt bright red, his long shorts deep blue, his skin perfect vanilla. With arms by his side and palms facing the sky, it looked as if he had fallen and could not get up.’ Whatever it was about the image that moved people, more and more individuals across Europe began to offer support to displaced people in large and small ways: signing online petitions, sending money, visiting refugee camps, joining protests and offering shelter in their own homes (Jones, 2015).

In the UK, this shift in public sympathies led to the government promising that it would take more refugees (having previously refused to participate in any international plan). It was announced that the UK would take twenty thousand Syrian refugees – coming through the UN resettlement programme – over five years. Rather than relocating people who were already in Europe, Britain would be resettling those from refugee camps in the region. In effect a territorial border and the ‘problem’ of refugees was moved from Europe to Syria, and a moral border was drawn around Syrians as legitimate (see Holmes and Castañeda, 2016) and deserving refugees (see also Chapter 5). The number (twenty thousand) was seen to be large, but once spread across five years, and across regions of the UK, meant that few families would arrive in any one area.<sup>2</sup> Thus the move enabled national

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<sup>2</sup>A survey published in early July 2016 found that a third of UK councils have refused to take in Syrian refugees because they lack the financial resources to support them. See [www.ibtimes.co.uk/one-third-councils-refuse-house-syrian-refugees-due-high-accommodation-costs-1569340](http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/one-third-councils-refuse-house-syrian-refugees-due-high-accommodation-costs-1569340) [last accessed 8 July 2016].

government to assuage growing public pressure for the UK to do something to help refugees, while effectively limiting its (conditional) hospitality.

The identification of Syrian refugees specifically as deserving of help (and the downgrading of the lives of others seeking refuge from elsewhere) changed again on 13 November, as media reported that a Syrian passport had been found near the body of one of the suspected terrorist attackers in Paris. In the attack 130 people had been murdered (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant 'ISIL' later claimed responsibility for the violence). Three days afterwards, the then Home Secretary, Theresa May, gave a speech associating immigrants with terrorists, superimposing an announcement of 'targeted security checks' on to a promise of more stringent control at both national and European borders. The point here is that the ways in which immigration and immigration enforcement emerge as a problem are continually evolving. This includes not only how categories of 'them' and 'us' are open to revision but also how these categories can be mediated by moments of, and movements between, indifference, welcome, compassion and conviviality (see Brah, 2012/1999; Jones and Jackson, 2014).

In the months following the Paris attacks, Britain's political debate increasingly focused on campaigns about whether to 'leave' or 'remain' in the European Union, with both sides focused on immigration. The Leave campaigners emphasised a promise to 'control immigration' and the Remain campaign appeared to offer something similar, though slightly less stridently. Over months, confusion abounded over what exactly was meant by immigration control. Would EU citizens in the UK have their residency rights removed? Would Britons have their residency rights, and freedom of movement, in other EU countries revoked in return? What would it mean, if anything, for non-EU citizens wanting to live in Britain? No specific details were given, except that immigration would be more 'in control' following the referendum, whatever the result. And it was promised that consequently, there would be an easing of the problems of limited jobs, housing and disinvestment in the NHS. These promises came from government ministers campaigning on both sides, and senior politicians and public figures.

In this atmosphere, on Thursday 16 June, exactly one week before the referendum vote, the then UKIP Leader and prominent Vote Leave campaigner Nigel Farage launched a poster with the words 'Breaking Point: The EU has failed us all. We must break free of the EU and take back control of our borders'. The words appeared



above an image of a crowded queue of Syrian refugees at the Slovenian border. Immediate parallels were drawn with similar images used in German Nazi propaganda (Lister, 2016). A few hours after the poster was unveiled, the Labour MP and pro-migrant Remain campaigner Jo Cox was murdered outside her constituency office by a man whom witnesses said they heard shouting far-right nationalist slogans.

Farage dismissed any connection between the temperature of the debate on migration and the assassination of Jo Cox, stating: 'The Remain camp are using these awful circumstances to try to say that the motives of one deranged, dangerous individual are similar to half the country, or perhaps more, who believe we should leave the EU' (quoted in Smith, 2016: n.p.). This was the same man who, a month earlier, had said: 'It's legitimate to say that if people feel they've lost control completely, and we have lost control of our borders completely as members of the EU, and if people feel voting doesn't change anything, then violence is the next step' (quoted in Simons, 2016: n.p.).

Farage's latter prediction seems to be materialising. His Leave campaign won the referendum, but, as we completed this book in the days following that result, the vote seemed to have changed both everything and nothing. Everything, as there was apparently no plan about how to proceed, no political leadership within the government (following the Prime Minister's resignation and before Theresa May's appointment as his replacement), or opposition (as Labour MPs attempted to remove their leader). There are dramatic economic fluctuations and uncertainty, with the renewed possibility of Scottish independence since Scotland voted strongly to remain in the EU, and increasing political fracturing between the almost equally divided voters across the country.

And nothing, because, in the days following the result, all key Leave campaigners insisted that they had never promised to reduce immigration, or to invest money they claimed would be saved from EU contributions into the NHS. In the days immediately after the referendum it emerged that there was no plan of how to begin negotiations or renegotiate the UK's relationship to the EU, or what this might mean in practice. And yet again everything, as violence towards EU migrants and racially minoritised people appears to have been reinvigorated. 'Go home' racist catcalls and graffiti have been reported in unusual numbers, and, as it becomes clear that 'migrants' (or those assumed to be) are not going anywhere, the anger and xenophobia that have been stoked are expected to become more intense. There is

a certain painful relentlessness to waking up every morning to more reports of racist abuse and violence. Our pained disbelief and depressed sighs carry the ‘worrying exhale of an ache’, as the poet Claudia Rankine (2014: 60) has written of the impact of living with the ongoingness of racism.

### **‘It’s all about immigration’**

I have been unprotected. I have been naked and exposed. I have been clothed and armoured. I know what I carry in my suitcase. I carry my history. I carry my family. Over my saris, I wear my sisters.  
(Shailja Patel, 2010: 41)

What has been clear at this time is how toxic and capacious the signifiers ‘migrant’ and ‘migration’ have become. People moving across state borders to settle in a new place do so for many reasons, with various citizenship and visa statuses (or their lack), with different economic and social resources, and different ethnicities and religions. The ‘problem’ of migration is at some points characterised simply by those who break the rules – as with the Go Home van and the question ‘In the UK illegally?’ This identification can slip into the association of asylum seekers as ‘rule breakers’, even though under the Geneva Convention it cannot be illegal to seek asylum (until that claim is accepted or rejected). There is also the slippage between seeing certain groups of migrants such as migrant workers, or ‘economic migrants’ as a problem, though often in the same breath there’s an appeal to visa systems that might prioritise ‘skilled workers’ or concerns are voiced about how immigration control can damage British industries, such as the seasonal work of fruit picking. As we saw in the shifts in mood toward Syrian refugees and a later entanglement with fears of terrorism, we now also see anti-immigration rhetoric blurring with Islamophobia: ‘It’s all about immigration. Right, it’s not about trade or Europe or anything like that, it’s all about immigration. It’s to stop the Muslims from coming into this country. Simple as that’. So said a ‘man in the street’ interviewed by a Channel 4 journalist the day the EU referendum result was announced (Jenkins, 2016).

As we write in this politically volatile context, we ask: what does it mean to live in this time of an obsession with borders and where ‘taking back control’ holds such a political and psychological appeal? How do different groups of people – migrants and refugees, policy-makers, British citizens and pro-migrant activists – understand and

narrate the ‘problem’ of immigration and its control? How might we make a problem out of the problem of immigration?

## Operation Vaken

It is with these questions in mind that we tell the story of our Mapping Immigration Controversy project. The study, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, investigated Operation Vaken that took place between 22 July and 22 August 2013. The short-lived, two-week Home Office campaign in England, Scotland and Wales included the Go Home vans discussed earlier. There was also a separate pilot scheme where ‘Ask about going home’ posters were put up in detention centres in Glasgow and Hounslow (see Chapter 4 for more detail).

Vaken is most often associated with the two Go Home vans that were driven through six of the most ethnically diverse London boroughs (Hounslow, Barking and Dagenham, Ealing, Barnet, Brent and Redbridge). The full message carried by the vans (see Figure 1) read: ‘In the UK illegally? GO HOME OR FACE ARREST. Text HOME to 78070 for free advice, and help with travel documents. We can help you return home voluntarily without fear of arrest or detention.’ Along with these words was a close-up of a border guard’s uniform and handcuffs, a telephone number to call, and the claim: ‘106 ARRESTS LAST WEEK IN YOUR AREA’. At the time of the piloting of Vaken, the Home Office issued press releases and Twitter updates, reporting on arrests of ‘immigration offenders’. The official Home Office Twitter account shared images of immigration raids, showing people being put into the back of secure vans. The tweets read, ‘There will be no hiding place for illegal immigrants with the new #immigration-bill’. Another hashtag was #immigrationoffender.

Not surprisingly it was the visual drama of the vans that attracted much press coverage and commentary from politicians, civil society organisations and the public. As well as eliciting anger, the vans became objects of ‘play’, a source of satire and ridicule in the ‘reverberation’ (Kuntsman, 2012) of feelings between online and offline worlds. The Liberal Democrat Cabinet Minister Vince Cable, speaking on the BBC, said that the campaign was ‘stupid and offensive’, adding, ‘It is designed, apparently, to sort of create a sense of fear [in the] British population that we have a vast problem with illegal immigration’ (Huff Post Politics, UK, 2013, n.p.). Images of the vans circulated quickly on social media, along with the hashtag #racistvan, directly connecting the language used with the history of the words

‘go home’ as racist abuse used in the streets and by far-right political groups such as the National Front in the 1970s.

In response to criticisms of Vaken, the then Minister for Immigration, Mark Harper, wrote an article in the tabloid newspaper the *Daily Mail* on 29 July 2013, saying that he had been ‘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” ’ (Harper, 2013a: n.p.). This rhetorical move to separate out racism from immigration control was not new. As the cultural theorist Paul Gilroy (2012) has observed, it was during New Labour’s administrations, between 1997 and 2010, that ‘the bogus proposition that race and immigration could be easily untangled in Britain’s political culture held sway’ (p. 380). This proposition holds that to be anti-migrant or anti-immigration is not the same as being racist. It was a rhetoric that did not go unchallenged.

On 2 August 2013, Doreen Lawrence (an anti-racist campaigner and Labour peer) added her voice to surfacing claims that Vaken’s immigration enforcement checks at railway and Tube stations were based on racial profiling, targeting racially minoritised commuters. ‘I’m sure there’s illegal immigrants from all countries, but why would you focus that on people of colour, and I think racial profiling is coming into it’, she said (Malik and Batty, 2013). Civil society organisations were also taking action to highlight Vaken’s racist tropes and the kindling of racism and suspicion within local communities. Three days before Harper’s article on 26 July, the Refugee and Migrant Forum of Essex and London (RAMFEL) (one of our community partners in the research for this book) held ‘an emergency tension-monitoring’ meeting with Home Office officials. On 31 July, RAMFEL announced that it had written to the Department to inform it of legal action to declare Vaken unlawful. In RAMFEL’s words:

Two service users from RAMFEL, supported by Deighton Pierce Glynn launched a legal challenge against the Home Office based on the fact that there had been no consultation done with anyone (community organisations, and local councils and borough police) and that the Home Office had failed [*sic*] to pay due regard to equality and cohesion issues. Further legal action was precluded by the fact that the Operation Vaken was a pilot.

(RAMFEL, n.d.)

In a written statement to Parliament in October 2013, Mark Harper gave this retrospective rationale for Vaken:

It is better for both the UK taxpayer and offenders themselves if offenders leave the country voluntarily rather than in an enforced manner. Immigration Compliance and Enforcement teams are therefore working to identify how they can promote the visibility of enforcement operations to drive compliance and encourage more immigration offenders to leave the UK voluntarily.

(Harper, 2013b: n.p.)

In short then, Vaken was presented as being for the benefit not only of immigration offenders but also of the UK taxpayer. The campaign was subsequently condemned by the Advertising Standards Authority for using inaccurate information (the ‘106 arrests in your area’ claim was inaccurate; see ASA, 2013). On 21 October, the Home Secretary announced that Vaken would be scrapped. Yet this drive to communications campaigns by national government, ostensibly targeted at immigration offenders but with an audience of the law-abiding and taxpaying public in mind, continued. This extended to similar measures over the following years, including an increased visibility of marked Home Office Enforcement vans on raids around the UK; signs in hospital waiting rooms declaring ‘The NHS is not free for everyone’ to highlight limited access to ‘universal’ healthcare for some migrants (see Figure 2); press releases on immigration enforcement activities; and ride-alongs for local and national journalists on immigration raids.

In fact, the spectacle-making of British immigration enforcement was not something that began in 2013. There was a clear turning point in the UK government approach to migration policy in around 2006, under a Labour government. A policy consensus in Whitehall and Westminster reached the conclusion that, while immigration had been a long-standing concern in public opinion polls (see Blinder, 2015), any previous attempts to define migration as good for the UK, particularly in economic and cultural terms, appeared to have no effect in increasing positive pro-immigration views and feelings. Instead, hostility to new immigration seems to have been taken as a given, and government resources invested in demonstrating a visibly tough approach to controlling borders and movement. In 2006, under the then Home Secretary John Reid, the visibility of UK Border Control at ports was increased, with new uniforms and signage, and politicians and journalists accompanying enforcement officers on photogenic immigration raids.

These changes in immigration enforcement are related to the increasing militarisation of policing and control in the UK that has taken place over decades. The changes happened incrementally and through the targeting of particular demonised groups, such as striking miners or rioting black youth, bringing tactics previously deployed in Northern Ireland to the British mainland.

Through the 1970s and 1980s to the present day, the physical appearance and weaponry employed shifted from a police force that did not differentiate between the appearance and uniform of the ‘bobby on the beat’ and officers deployed in urban disturbances, to become actively intimidating. After the Brixton disturbances in the summer of 1981, and while Lord Scarman was still compiling his report into the events, the results of a review of ‘protective clothing and equipment’ announced that in future the police would have special riot gear: overalls, ‘NATO’ helmets, special shields (short and long), special riot batons (much longer and thicker than usual), ‘protective’ screens for transits, and CS gas and plastic bullets (Bunyan, 1985: 301). The language throughout was militaristic, speaking of gaining and holding ground, seeking ‘strategic’ advantage and inducing fear (Bunyan, 1985: 302).

The 2006 introduction of newly branded staff and vehicles to undertake immigration enforcement, including the extension of immigration raids with the accompanying militarised uniforms and dogs, could be regarded as another development of this militarised approach to public order. Just as the introduction of military-derived equipment for police officers was deployed to induce fear among particular targeted groups, shows of force in the name of immigration enforcement might also be regarded as a tactical performance of power.

During the period of escalating militarisation of policing through the 1970s and 1980s, this uneven performance of violent intent was communicated as a confirmation that there were indeed enemies within. In this framework the performance of power has two distinct audiences – those who are the immediate target of coercive power and those who must be persuaded that the state is exerting its powers against dangerous ‘others’.

As we will go on to explain (see Chapter 2), we understand Vaken as part of this developing ‘performative politics’ (Rai, 2015) of immigration control, in which emotions are recruited and played upon. Margaret Wetherell’s (2012) notion of ‘affective practice’ as including situated discourses, practices and bodily states, has helped us to think through and apply the ideas of the political theorist Shirin Rai (2015) on political performance to our empirical research (discussed further

in Chapter 2). Rai describes political performance as ‘Those performances that seek to communicate to an audience meaning-making related to state institutions, policies and discourses’ (2015: 1179). However, the extent to which such communication is successful in achieving its intended effects is always locally contingent and unstable (see also Austin, 1975/1962).

The hate speech of a politician or a journalist, for instance, can overlap with what is said in a café or in a focus group interview, but the power and consequences of each of these speech acts are not the same. Because our project included various levels of research that moved between texts and policy discourses, such as the post-hoc rationale for Vaken given by Mark Harper, to talk-in-interaction in social media, to observation and one-to-one interviews and focus groups in different localities, we have been able to decipher some of the continuities as well as what Wetherell calls the ‘different compositional logic’ (2012: 159) of the affective practices surrounding Vaken. As we show in Chapter 4, the localities in which elements of government communications campaigns were deployed, and the ways opposition to them was mobilised, shaped how the campaign was variously felt and responded to in different contexts.

## What we found

Throughout the book, we discuss the findings of our research in detail. Our data and analysis are intertwined, and we draw on existing knowledge and theory in the social sciences to make sense of what we have found. Here, though, we summarise very briefly what our research uncovered.

- 1 We found **no evidence that government communications about immigration and enforcement are based on research about ‘what works’** in managing immigration. The only research evidence policy-makers mentioned to us was privately commissioned research on managing public opinion about immigration, particularly among those worried that immigration is ‘out of control’. Yet our research suggests the tactics used on this basis can increase fear and anxiety.
- 2 **Government campaigns on immigration provoked or increased anger and fear**, among irregular migrants,

- regular migrants and non-migrants, including those opposed to immigration. The latter told us they thought that the government campaigns were ineffective ‘theatre’.
- 3 For people who were the subjects of immigration campaigns (or felt under threat from them), talking about the publicity campaigns often led them to think about their own experiences of immigration enforcement and triggered feelings of fear and anxiety. **Our own research focused on communications campaigns, but participants also made direct links to, for example, images of enforcement raids and their own experiences of immigration enforcement in their homes.**
  - 4 **Hard-hitting government publicity on immigration seemed to provoke new waves of pro-migrant activism.** Anger and outrage was translated into online and street-based activism, including by people who had not been engaged in activism before.
  - 5 Some, but not all, activism has been migrant-led, and **we identified inequalities in who felt able to take part in political debate because of real or perceived threats to their residency status as a result.**
  - 6 **Traditional anti-racism campaigns are finding it hard to keep up with changes in the focus of hostility and discrimination,** for example with how to engage with the status of international students and asylum seekers.
  - 7 Our local case studies demonstrated **local variations in how government campaigns were experienced, and the activism that was produced in response.** In some places migrants and activists could build on existing infrastructures for political organising. In other places such resources did not exist or had dwindled, or energies were focused on service provision for vulnerable people in an increasingly difficult funding environment.
  - 8 **There is not always solidarity between people being targeted by anti-immigration campaigns.** We found several instances of hostility between different groups of migrants, often based on an idea that their own group was ‘deserving’ of residency and status in the UK, while others were ‘undeserving’.
  - 9 The different legal statuses that migrants can have is confusing. For many people in the wider public, the distinctions between ‘illegal’ and ‘legal’, and between asylum



seeker, refugee, student, worker, resident, and sometimes between migrants and ethnic minority British-born people is difficult to understand. **Many people reported harassment for being ‘illegal immigrants’ when they had settled status, or were British citizens.**

- 10 **We heard that many people had come to the UK because of ideals often promoted as ‘British values’** – such as democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance for those with different faiths and beliefs. **Their experience since arrival called into doubt the existence of these values.**

## Researching immigration

As well as telling the story of government immigration communication campaigns, we want to contribute to thinking and discussions about the role of critical migration research and the relationships between activism and research (see also Casas-Cortes et al., 2014; Walia, 2013). There is a ‘civic task’ at stake in how we make use of our sociological imaginations in such endeavours, the sociologist Alberto Toscano argues, which ‘is not to create pacifying knowledge, but to sharpen and concretise what would otherwise be a vague and powerless anxiety, while at the same time providing a realistic estimate of the powers necessary to alter, however minimally, the course of history’ (2012: 68). The term ‘militant investigation’ (Casas-Cortes et al., 2014) has been used more recently to refer to new ways of thinking about and doing migration research, although research propelled by a ‘civic task’ has a long history in early British research on migration and race, such as the studies *Race, Community and Conflict* by John Rex and Robert Moore (1967), Elizabeth Burney’s *Housing on Trial* (1967), *Racial Discrimination in England* (Daniel, 1968) and *Because They’re Black* (Humphry and John, 1971).

For us, it was crucially important that we connected and extended the civic task of sociology to the structures and practices of actually doing the research. The MIC team included early career academics and more established scholars. We are predominantly women, and women of various ethnicities and migration histories. An aspiration of our research, from the very beginning, is outlined in a warning from Stuart Hall and his ‘Policing the Crisis’ (1978) co-authors: we tried not to fall into ‘a trap of “liberal opinion” – to split analysis from

action' (Hall et al., 1978: ix). As we have already mentioned, our research began in July 2013 with unfunded street surveys to capture, as quickly as we could, reactions to Vaken (details of the methods we used are in the Appendix). At the time, our primary aim was to record and provide some evidence of the impact of Vaken, and more ambitiously to intervene in and encourage public discussions of immigration enforcement.

However, on the same day that we began to foment the idea of immediate action research to counter Vaken, we were separately alerted to a call for proposals by the Urgent Research Grant scheme of the Economic and Social Research Council. It seemed to be worth a try to do something bigger and more systematic. In putting our funding proposal together, we consolidated our connections with local civil society organisations that were interested in doing some of the research with us in their local areas. Their time was costed into the proposal (see Living Research Six). The organisations helped us to shape our overall research questions and research design, to identify activists and community workers to interview in each area, recruited participants for our focus groups and invited us to local events and meetings where immigration enforcement was being discussed. They also helped us to set up feedback sessions, where we took the interim findings of our research back to open meetings in each community, and learned more from their responses, which in turn were fed into our emerging analysis.

In brief, the research methods that we used in the study consisted of:

- 13 focus groups with 67 people (including new migrants, 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 to investigate 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, using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing software. 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.

The approach we took in the project comes closest to the ethos of ‘live sociology’, which is the term coined by sociologist Les Back (2007; 2012) for a sociology that is civic, dialogic and multisensory (see also Back and Puwar, 2012). Live sociology for Back is ‘historically situated, reflective, contestable, uncomfortable, partisan and fraught’ (2007: 22), with an ‘intellectual architecture’ attentive to the ‘scope and scale of global social processes’ (2012: 20). One way in which we tried to be receptive to matters of ‘scope and scale’ in the statecraft of immigration communications was to use a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. By working across methods and sites of research, including the digital, we were able to connect the more nuanced and intimate responses that we elicited through our face-to-face interviews and observations to larger, more distanced and distributed affective patterns. Our survey not only focused attention on immigration enforcement, we were also able to contextualise some of our questions with regard to racism (see Chapter 2). A vital aspect of our ‘live sociology’ is that it has been collaborative throughout (see Living Research Six). This included producing research in partnership with those outside the academy, communicating our thoughts and engagement with immigration politics as they unfolded in real time through blog posts and Twitter. And, not least, the imagining, writing, editing and redrafting of this book have been a collective effort.

## **About this book**

Throughout the book, we draw upon ideas and theories from cultural studies, economics, politics, media and communications and sociology to develop an account of contemporary British immigration enforcement politics. There are six substantive chapters, which begin by contextualising Vaken with regard to the performative politics of immigration control (Chapter 2) and post-liberal governmentality (Chapter 3). Chapters 4 and 5 provide a more close-up analysis of our empirical research, situating the research within space and place (Chapter 4) and critically examining narratives of the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ migrant, and ways these characterisations have been

resisted (Chapter 5). Chapter 6, our concluding chapter, brings together the key themes from our research and raises questions about the developing politics of immigration control at the critical and fast-changing moment in which we complete this book.

The chapters are separated by short interludes that we have titled 'Living Research'. These are reflective pieces, breathing and thinking spaces that offer our thoughts and experiences of doing the research. They cover why we did the research (Living Research One); the methodological challenges of researching emotionally charged topics (Two); the politics of migration research and the media (Three); ethics (Four); how social media and social research allowed us to channel and also connect our anger at Vaken with others (Five); and how the collaborative aspects of the research worked (and didn't work) in practice (Six). The Living Research sections are intended to incite thinking and dialogue about these issues of the politics and practice, as well as the findings, of research. For this reason we also include some questions for the reader to reflect on, whether in a group or independently.

Our understanding of Vaken draws on the framework of performance politics proposed by the political scientist Shirin Rai (2015). In Chapter 2 we describe and use Rai's work to make sense of the deployment of theatricalised violence by the British state in which performances of state power are directed at many audiences and serve to segment the population. Drawing on our research we suggest that, despite attempts to address a diversity of audiences, communications and performances of immigration policing appear to be met with indifference or anxiety. They can also be reinterpreted through a popular cynicism that is influenced by a broader culture of anti-politics. Chapter 2 explores the impact of such scepticism on the politics of migration, and asks whether there are possibilities for a politics based on mutuality.

In Chapter 3 we consider how the politicisation of British immigration policy tests the limits of 'liberal governmentality' (Rose and Miller, 1992). Typically, this form of government is understood in terms of splitting questions of 'politics' from those of 'expertise', employing statistics, professions, economics, audits and so on, to insulate certain issues as matters of 'fact' or 'efficiency'. 'Blackboxing' political questions through the use of statistics (and utilitarian assumptions), we suggest, is a way of preventing them from turning into controversies which invite public deliberation. Immigration is an exception that evades this bracketing. More emotional, story-based impressions of immigration, often cultivated by the media, appear hard to dislodge through statistical data. Under these circumstances,

policy-makers have engaged in different types of knowledge acquisition and production, focusing on the affective, emotional and symbolic dimensions of immigration. This involves unwieldy combinations of pre-liberal sovereign performances (parading state violence) with postliberal attempts to manipulate affect (nudging and social marketing). Here, by engaging with policy-makers' accounts of the negotiations they make in this context, we explore the strains that immigration control places on liberal governmentality, with its desire to separate technical decisions from politics, and the challenge posed by postliberal approaches which emphasise morality and distinctions between deserving and undeserving subjects.

Having contextualised the Go Home van and other government anti-immigration communications as part of a performative politics that challenges liberal governmentality, we move on to situate these developments by considering the part played by spaces and places – from the street to the digital realm – in the implementation and reception of, and resistance to, anti-immigration campaigns (Chapter 4). For us, such interventions are closely tied to the increasingly domestic nature of immigration control and as they are enacted in particular spaces, with different local histories of migration and activism, they have had unintended consequences. These include increased fear, feelings of not belonging and acts of resistance. For instance, we discuss how opposition to Go Home posters in Glasgow fed into debates about Scottish Independence and how the Go Home vans' appearance in West London played into divisive discourses of respectability among more established migrants and British citizens. We argue that it is vital to consider specific sites of immigration intervention and resistance (e.g. the hospital waiting room, Twitter) and how local and urban contexts shape and are shaped by reaction and resistance when examining the impact of anti-immigration campaigns.

The distinctions between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' migrants (and citizens), that are made by local people, including those from racially minoritised communities and recent immigrants, are the subject of Chapter 5. Our research has found a certain complicity with anti-immigrant messages and, as diverse local communities compete over limited resources, the exacerbation of latent tensions. In making sense of these findings, we use Bridget Anderson's exploration of 'communities of value' (2013), Imogen Tyler's theorisation of social abjection (2013) and Beverley Skeggs' examination of the politics of respectability in relation to gender and class (1997; 2014). In an intersectional analysis we look at the fracturing of the connections between 'race' and immigration and discuss the role of socially conservative codes of respectability in internalising disgust towards

particular social groups – sex workers, the destitute and people using alcohol and drugs (some of who are assumed to have irregular immigration status).

## **Our own**

The proliferation of domestic immigration enforcement, the seemingly more mundane and shadowy ‘other’ of international border control and necropolitics, has uneven and unexpected effects. Immigration is itself an internally differentiated experience of inclusion and exclusion (Erel, 2010) and of changing identifications (La Barbera, 2013).

We know that the damage inflicted by enforcement campaigns can be slow-paced and dispersed across lives. It is difficult to quantify and capture. Operation Vaken was terrifying for some people. For others, it signalled the authorising and normalisation of the public expression of hostility towards immigration and migrants. ‘It is now acceptable to come out and say I am anti-immigration’ one person told us in a focus group interview.

If government communications on immigration lend a certain respectability to anti-migrant feelings and racism, we should not forget that it can also galvanise opposition and dissent, both serious and playful. The government’s own evaluation of the Operation Vaken makes for interesting reading (Home Office, 2013). Of the 1,561 text messages received by the Home Office, 1,034 were hoax messages, taking up 17 hours of staff time. At the time of writing, the YouTube film of one of our research partners, Southall Black Sisters, disrupting a Vaken immigration raid has been viewed over 39,000 times,<sup>3</sup> suggesting an impact much wider than the original spontaneous event (discussed further in Living Research One and Five and Chapter 4).

There are plenty more examples of dissent from the politics of suspicion and hatred, signifying what the political scholar Vicki Squire (2011) thinks of as ‘mobile solidarities’ – collective engagements and small acts of hospitality that cut across social hierarchies and divisions. We also take heart from the work of the feminist and postcolonial theorist Avtar Brah, whose doctoral research (1979) in three schools in Southall in the 1970s, sought to better understand the interrelations between race, ethnicity and class in this fast-changing West London community. Brah’s research picked up on similar themes to ours in

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<sup>3</sup>[www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQ0\\_TFBVots](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQ0_TFBVots) [last accessed 27 June 2016].

the interplay between xenophobia and racism, the feelings of resentment, fear and antipathy to the arrival of migrants from India and the Caribbean. At the same time Brah (2012/1999: 20–1) identified complicated and ambivalent affinities across lines of class, gender and ethnicity, expressed most beautifully in the South Asian creole language of Urdu. Urdu recognises dynamic movements between the positions of ‘ajnabi’ (‘a stranger; a newcomer whom one does not yet know but who holds the promise of friendship, love, intimacy’), ‘ghair’ (where difference ‘walks the tightrope between insider/outsider’) and ‘apna’ (‘one of our own’).

As borders continue to mobilise and insinuate themselves across and within our everyday lives, our hope is that so will resistance and a more unconditional hospitality to migrants, who might yet cross the most significant frontier, moving across the boundary of the ajnabi into the space of the apne (plural) – our own.

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