

‘I Felt Like a Bird Without Wings’: Incorporating the Study of Emotions into Grounded Normative Theory

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Abstract:

This article explores how giving systematic attention to emotions could enhance grounded normative theory accounts. Grounded normative theory, and related approaches featuring an ‘ethnographic sensibility’, involve the conduct of original empirical research and/or analysis in the development of normative arguments. It has been increasingly visible in normative political theory, focusing on moral claims in contexts such as migration, democratic practice, and grassroots struggles. Yet, while such accounts have sought to sensitively present experiences of injustice and exclusion within such contexts, they have given relatively little attention to the emotional or ‘affective’ turn in normative theory and social science disciplines, where emotions are studied as integral to political/moral claims and the motivation of action. We highlight how a similar emphasis on emotions as integral to political and moral claims could enrich grounded normative theory, in part through presenting an illustrative analysis of emotional expressions by immigration detainees in the UK. We show how such analysis can expand normative inputs, and clarify or reveal normative issues arising in a given empirical context. We also highlight how grounded normative work could enrich normative treatments of political emotions.

Keywords:

Emotions; affect; grounded normative theory; immigration detention; normative political theory

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This article explores how giving systematic attention to emotions could enhance grounded normative theory accounts. Grounded normative theory, and related approaches featuring an ‘ethnographic sensibility,’ involve the conduct of original empirical research and/or analysis in the development of normative arguments. It has been increasingly visible in normative political theory, focusing on moral claims in contexts such as migration, democratic practice, and grassroots struggles. Yet, while such accounts have sought to sensitively present experiences of injustice and exclusion within such contexts, they have given relatively little attention to the emotional or ‘affective’ turn in normative theory and social science disciplines, where emotions are studied as integral to political/moral claims and the motivation of action. We highlight how a similar emphasis on emotions as integral to political and moral claims could enrich grounded normative theory, in part through presenting an illustrative analysis of emotional expressions by immigration detainees in the UK. We show how such analysis can expand normative inputs, and clarify or reveal normative issues arising in a given empirical context. We also highlight how grounded normative work could enrich normative treatments of political emotions.

Introduction

Scholars engaging in grounded normative theory (Ackerly et al., 2021; see Mansbridge, 1983; Doty, 2006; Johnson, 2015; Ackerly, 2018), as well as those incorporating an ‘ethnographic sensibility’ into processes of political theorising (Herzog and Zacka, 2019; Longo and Zacka, 2019; Prinz, 2020), have sought to advance the development of normative claims through conducting original empirical research and/or analysis. Numerous such theorists have undertaken extensive field research projects in order to gain more fine-grained understandings of relevant empirical contexts (Ackerly, 2010; 2018; Cabrera, 2010; 2020; Tonkiss, 2013; Johnson, 2015; Rubenstein, 2015; Reed-Sandoval, 2020; see Zacka, 2017; Herzog, 2018). Such work has been framed in part (Ackerly et al., 2021) as a way of responding to claims that normative political theory is disconnected from real-world politics (Galston, 2010; see also Waldron, 2016; Alexander, 2018), or gives too little attention to findings in empirical research (Bauböck, 2008).

The methodological suppositions and commitments of grounded normative theory and related ethnographic approaches have increasingly been explored by practitioners and commentators (Ackerly et al., 2021; Zacka et al., 2021). Ackerly and co-authors, for example, highlight how grounded normative theorists have used empirical engagement to try to expand inputs for their normative arguments, better ensure attentiveness to often excluded voices, and improve overall accountability to groups and individuals treated in their normative arguments. Despite such commitments, however, grounded normative theorists have given little explicit attention to connections between emotions and moral claims, or to the roles emotions can play in political struggles.

This is an increasingly notable omission, given the ways emotions have increasingly been foregrounded in normative political theory accounts more generally. Martha Nussbaum, for example, has investigated emotions such as sympathy/compassion, shame, anger and disgust in legal and political contexts in several widely influential works (Nussbaum, 2001; 2004; 2013; 2016; see Brooks, ed., 2022). Others similarly have examined the roles played by disgust, resentment or hatred in political contexts (Hoggett and Thompson, 2012; Crociani-Windland and Hoggett, 2012; Demertzis, 2013; Mihai, 2016; Brudholm and Lang, 2018). Globally oriented normative theorists have made emotions such as empathy and compassion central to their explorations of possible means of motivating ethical action across state boundaries (Jeffery, 2014; see Boltanski, 1999, Chs.5-6; Woods, 2012; Gould, 2020; Hobbs, 2020). More generally, emotions have increasingly been systematically studied in empirical political science (Groenendyk, 2011; Costalli and Ruggeri, 2017), international relations (Crawford, 2014; Hutchison and Bleiker, 2014; Hall and Ross, 2019), policy studies (Anderson, 2013; Hardill and Mills, 2013; Newman, 2013) and cognate fields.

This article highlights ways in which similarly focused attention to emotion could add significant value to grounded normative theory accounts. It does so in part through

demonstrating the expansion of normative inputs made possible when emotional expressions are taken into account in a qualitative case study. Specifically, we examine forty anonymous testimonies submitted to a 2015 parliamentary inquiry into the use of immigration detention in the United Kingdom, one of numerous states adopting a policy of holding undocumented migrants and people seeking asylum for varying, often indefinite, amounts of time (Turnbull, 2017). We conduct a thematic analysis of the ‘emotional registers of discourse’ (Newman, 2012) contained within these testimonies, identifying emotions related to experiences of dehumanisation. We highlight ways in which such emotions can be seen as integral to moral reasoning, and how such findings could be used in the development of a broader normative argument about detention.

The article is structured as follows: after first giving an overview of grounded normative theory, we give further details on the affective turn in some disciplines. We present the illustrative case study and analysis, before discussing its findings as a means of demonstrating the potential of enriching grounded normative theory by recognising the foundational role played by emotion in the construction of moral claims-making in situated contexts. We then outline directions for future research.

Grounded Normative Theory

Grounded normative theory again involves the conduct and/or analysis of empirical research in the process of developing normative arguments (Ackerly, 2018; Ackerly et al., 2021; see Tonkiss, 2013, Ch.4; 2016; Cabrera, 2020, Ch.5). It aims to enable theorists to strengthen the theoretical coherence and empirical relevance of such arguments through systematic engagement with salient political and social contexts. It can be distinguished from more straightforwardly empirical grounded theory as it has developed in sociology and other fields (Charvaz, 2015). That is, the core emphasis of grounded normative theory is the development

of normative claims and arguments, rather than the development or interpretive or explanatory empirical theories, or thick descriptive accounts of empirical phenomena.

Grounded normative theory can be traced back at least to Jane Mansbridge's influential monograph *Beyond Adversarial Democracy* (1983) with numerous partial forerunners. Mansbridge's normative claims about democratic equality and participation were deeply informed by her own surveys and qualitative interviews conducted around a Vermont town meeting and a democratically governed workplace (1983, pp.304-32). More recently, theorists have conducted grounded normative theory investigations in the context of migration to the United States (Doty, 2006; 2009; Cabrera, 2010; Forman, 2018; Longo, 2018; Reed-Sandoval, 2020), as well as migration and mobility issues in the United Kingdom (Tonkiss, 2013; 2016), Australia (Stivens, 2018) and elsewhere (McNevin and Missbach, 2018). Other accounts have combined normative and empirical investigations in such contexts as deliberation in UK health policy debates (Parkinson, 2006), participatory budgeting policy in Canadian community housing authorities (Johnson, 2015), and practices of international non-governmental organisations (Rubenstein, 2015).

Grounded normative theory accounts also have investigated broader issues of human rights and global justice (Kurasawa, 2007; Ackerly, 2008; 2018), citizenship, political obligation, social welfare and disadvantage (Klosko, 2004; Banting and Kymlicka, 2006; Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007; Schattle, 2008), and tensions between state-transcendent moral principles and deeply nationalistic conceptions of governance in states such as India and the UK (Nussbaum, 2007, Ch.2; Cabrera, 2010, Chs.8-9; see also Keating, 2011).¹ Numerous studies of democratic deliberation also would fall under the grounded normative theory rubric, insofar as their empirical findings are used to inform recursive normative theorising about deliberation, rather than solely to test empirical hypotheses about its efficacy or effects (see Curato et al., 2017).

Finally, more recent accounts presented as political theory with an ethnographic sensibility arguably would fall within the broad rubric of grounded normative theory, given their emphasis on recursive and accountable empirical engagement in the development of normative arguments (Herzog and Zacka, 2019; Longo and Zacka, 2019; Prinz, 2020; see Zacka et al., 2021). So would some field philosophy approaches such as Bierria's (2020) 'grassroots philosophy', in which theorizing begins with close study of and participation in activist practice, expanding the set of moral claims to be considered.

Ackerly and colleagues (2021) identify four commitments typical of grounded normative theory accounts: comprehensiveness, recursivity, attentiveness to epistemological inclusion, and epistemic accountability. Comprehensiveness refers to ways in which 'grounded normative theorists use empirical methods to collect and/or analyse data to diversify, broaden, and deepen the range of insights, claims, interests, and actors considered in their development of normative arguments' (Ackerly et al., 2021, p.5). Specifically, empirical engagement can expand the set of moral claims to be considered. It can expand and clarify the set of possible objections addressed, while also enabling an expanded set of actors to offer their own salient objections or concerns in their own words (see Cabrera, 2020, Ch.5).

Recursivity relates to analysis of empirical findings, and methods of incorporating them into normative claims that involve revision and refinement, as the theorist repeatedly engages with data, with actors in the context, etc. Such practices can help to clarify or correct empirical presumptions on which normative arguments and any prescriptions depend. Attentiveness describes ways in which grounded theorists typically attend to voices excluded in normative theory through their empirical engagement. Accountability is highly relevant to qualitative field research, involving attention given to power imbalances between the researcher and those engaged. In general, Ackerly and co-authors highlight, the broader the empirical net cast, and

the more recursive and accountable the process of theory development, the more such empirical engagement has helped to strengthen normative theory accounts.

In terms of specific methods, grounded normative theory may entail extended qualitative field research (Doty, 2009; Tonkiss, 2013; Ackerly, 2008; 2018), qualitative data analysis (Van Den Anker, 2008; Keating, 2011), or quantitative analysis (Mansbridge, 1983; Banting and Kymlicka, 2006). The emphasis in this article is on qualitative field research, typically involving semi-structured interviews and/or the analysis of statements and content, and in some cases participant-observation or other ethnographic methods. It may also be conducted in the broadly inductive vein of empirical grounded theory, where theoretical claims are developed from the ‘ground up’, via engagement in empirical contexts (Ackerly, 2008; 2018). Or the development may begin with some preliminary normative claims, which are then refined, revised or rejected based on empirical engagement (Mansbridge, 1983; Cabrera, 2010; 2020).

Finally, grounded normative theory may be conducted in more or less solidaristic modes, where normative theoretical aims are explicitly aligned with the aims of those engaged, or are intended to advance them. In terms of a more solidaristic approach, for example, Brooke Ackerly conducted field interviews and extensive observations with human rights activists at international meetings such as the World Social Forum, with the aim of developing ‘a political account of immanent universal human rights from the perspective of those fighting for their rights’ (2008, p.27; see also Ackerly, 2018). Less solidaristic accounts may involve engagement with respondents whose beliefs are at odds with the normative claims ultimately offered (see Doty, 2009; Cabrera, 2020, Ch.8).

The Affective Turn

An emphasis on emotions has been implicit in some grounded normative theory accounts, or treated as potentially instrumentally important to motivating ethical action, for example, in discussion of how empirical engagement can help to highlight what is at stake for persons facing oppression, exclusion or injustices in their lived contexts (Cabrera, 2020, pp.118-19; see also Doty, 2009; Ackerly, 2010; 2018). There has been little discussion, however, of the importance or integrality of emotions to normative claims, or how grounded investigations of emotions per se could influence or enhance the development of the theorist's own normative arguments. Grounded normative theory accounts have focused instead on highlighting explicit or implicit claims of fairness, inequality, unjust exclusions, responsibility for injustice, etc., in empirical contexts.

As noted, emotions increasingly have been foregrounded in some areas of normative political theory, and in a range of explanatory or interpretive accounts across social science disciplines. In terms of the former, numerous theorists have sought to problematize any stark reason/emotion dichotomies. Nussbaum, for example, argues for a neo-Stoic view that 'emotions are appraisals or value judgments, which ascribe to things and persons outside the person's own control great importance for that person's own flourishing' (2001, p.4). Emotions such as anger are thus integrally connected to beliefs about appropriate action by others, etc., and also to personal aims. She has explored how emotions such as compassion should figure in legal judgments (2004, pp.62-71), and how compassion and related pro-social emotions could promote stability in liberal-democratic societies (2013).

Renee Jeffery (2014), drawing insights from an extensive survey of cognitive psychology work and David Hume's theorization of moral sentiments, argues for an emphasis not only on the cognitive basis of emotions, but also on feelings accompanying some emotions. Such an approach, she argues, appropriately considers findings in psychology about ways in

which emotion is integral to capacities for and processes of ethical reasoning, and also ways in which actually taking ethical action can be spurred by associated feelings. In Jeffery's terms,

...both reason and emotion have essential roles to play in practical ethics. Together ... these two modes of reflective thought provide the means of inspiring those of us living in affluence to make effective moral judgments about our obligations to others and motivating us to actually do something to better the lives of those living in poverty around the world (Jeffery 2014, 196).

While Jeffery's account is likely the most detailed and systematic in its engagement with empirical findings on reason, emotion and associated feelings, numerous others have again explored the possible roles that emotions could play in motivating ethical action across national boundaries (Boltanski, 1999; Chs.5-6; Long, 2009; Woods, 2012; Coicaud, 2014; Gould, 2020; Hobbs, 2020). This work has drawn particular attention to the importance of empathy and compassion to such action, in contrast to the force of emotions such as fear and disgust (Nussbaum, 2016; see also Beattie et al., 2019; Crawford, 2014).

An 'affective turn' in the social sciences more broadly has been the subject of considerable scholarship over roughly the past two decades. Researchers have sought to systematically bring attention to emotions into the study of social and political phenomena (Hoggett et al., 2013; Jupp et al., 2016), on the basis that a 'silencing' of emotions in social research has produced an incomplete understanding of social and political practices (Hardill and Mills, 2013). Much of the literature which comprises this affective turn takes its cue from feminist research, which has long placed emotion at the centre of social scientific investigation.² Feminist scholars have critiqued the binary division of rationality (associated with the masculine) and emotionality (associated with the feminine) as a strategy for excluding women from the public sphere³ (Ahall, 2018). For example, Ahall describes feminist methodology as centred on 'being as a way of knowing' and on a '...questioning about how

bodies matter politically’ (p.41; see also Hemmings, 2012). Emotions are thus conceptualised as an ‘embodied form of knowledge’ occurring through lived experience of a given phenomenon (Anderson, 2013, p.7; Peltola et al., 2018) and – as in Nussbaum, Jeffery and other normative theorists’ accounts – interrelated with cognition in a complex, context-dependent dualism (Hutchison and Bleiker, 2014). Emotion has come to the fore, as such, as part of the study of the embodiment of experiencing a particular lived context, or particular configurations of power. The latter could, for example, refer to ways in which some political elites have sought to generate anger and resentment against those framed as outsiders in order to gain and maintain political power (Aistrophe, 2020; Hall and Ross, 2019). It also can refer to ways in which emotions can act as an ‘emancipatory force to re-imagine or resist hegemonic power’ (Beattie et al., 2019; see also Gould, 2009, Ch.4).

The scholarship comprising this affective turn has sought to reflect on the inter-relationship of affect and emotion that comes to ‘shape the structure and texture of society’ (Thompson and Hoggett, 2012, p.3). While some accounts treat emotion as a cognitive, psychological process arising from the structure of the brain (Redlawsk, 2006; see also Neuman et al., 2007; Marcus, 2022), others focus on ‘affect’ as a broad term encompassing emotion as a social practice, and have as such driven a greater appreciation of the social aspect of emotions (Jeffery, 2018). They emphasize affect as a bodily experience occurring before conscious thought in a particular situated context. The result of this non-conscious affect comes to be understood and expressed through languages of emotion which are culturally specific, and so differ from one situated context to the next (Gould, 2009). Views on the character of this relationship between non-conscious affect and the cognition and expression of emotion differ, with some viewing them as distinct but overlapping concepts (Thompson and Hoggett, 2012) and others seeing them as largely indistinguishable from one another (Ahall, 2018; Ahmed, 2014).

The analysis of the case study below is significantly informed by Ahmed's (2014) approach, which sees emotions as practices, shaped by and shaping our conscious and non-conscious interactions with objects in the social world. This means that while they can be experienced in individual bodies, they are produced socially (Moss et al., 2020), bound up in the emotional experiences of others and with particular places and spaces (see also Hutchison and Bleiker, 2014). This social dimension to emotion has been theorised by some as resulting in large-scale 'structures of feeling' underlying social relations in a given context (see Hoggett et al., 2013), or as a 'habitus of emotion' containing an 'emotional pedagogy' shaping how we feel at a non-conscious level (Gould, 2009, Ch.4). For our purposes this social, relational aspect to emotion is particularly important to recognise, and likely more generative for grounded normative theory, since we are interested in the ways in which structures of inequality and potential injustice, and their everyday practice in situated contexts, are themselves particular emotional experiences for marginalised people.

In the following sections, we work to show how such an emphasis on emotions could inform empirical engagement in grounded normative theory, with emphasis on the analysis of qualitative data. We focus on the 'micro' scale (see Hutchison and Bleiker, 2014), and on ways in which emotion could inform and be incorporated into a grounded analysis. The discussion is meant to be illustrative rather than to constitute a fully realised grounded normative theory argument. It should, however, highlight some insights to be gained through incorporating emotional aspects of lived experience into ground normative accounts.

Case Study: Immigration Detention

We draw here on a case study of the emotional experience of immigration detention in the UK. Immigration detention is 'the deprivation of a noncitizen's liberty for the purposes of an immigration-related goal' (Silverman, 2012, p.1134). It forms an increasingly central part of

policy apparatuses (Turnbull, 2017), with nearly every state adopting some form of immigration detention policy (Conlon and Hiemsta, 2017; Nethery and Silverman, 2015). Governments have implemented immigration detention policies for a number of reasons, including the determination of identity, the prevention of absconding during the assessment of a claim to stay, and the deterrence of further unwanted migration (Sampson and Mitchell, 2013; Silverman, 2012; Turnbull, 2017). In this latter case, detention has been shown to play a central role in displaying ‘sovereign enforcement, control and power’ (Mainwaring and Silverman, 2017, p.21).

In legal terms, immigration detention is an administrative rather than penal practice. This means that while detention facilities may share some of the characteristics of prisons, they differ in crucial ways. Immigration detention cannot be used to punish, and it is to be used in cases where detainees meet a particular set of administrative criteria, rather than where ruled by a judge. This criteria upon which decision to detain are taken can as such be applied to whole categories of people, rather than to individuals based on their distinctive circumstances. The length of sentence is also uncertain, unlike in the case of criminal incarceration (Nethery and Silverman, 2015).

While some authors (Lenard, 2015; Sager, 2017) have argued that time-limited immigration detention is justified as a last resort to protect the public interest by securing borders, others have challenged the bases for it. They argue that detention has proven ineffective as a deterrence mechanism (Silverman, 2014; see also International Detention Coalition, 2015a), and that people do not abscond from non-custodial arrangements unless the state’s own actions driven them to, in order to obtain money for accommodation and food (Turnbull, 2017).

We focus here on the embodied, emotional experience of immigration detention as a form of knowledge most accessible to those with lived experience of it. We analysed forty

testimonies of people previously or currently held in immigration detention. Their statements were gathered as part of an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) inquiry into the use of immigration detention in the UK (APPG on Refugees and APPG on Migration, 2015). This report recommended that decisions to detain should be a last resort, and if detention is necessary, it should be for the shortest possible time – 28 days at the longest. It recommended that the UK should move to community-based resolutions rather than strict detention, citing concerns around the arbitrary deprivation of liberty, prison-like conditions, lack of legal representation, inadequate healthcare, and failure to protect vulnerable detainees.

Despite these recommendations, in 2019 around 24,400 people entered immigration detention, 73 of whom were children, and around half of whom had claimed asylum in the UK. At least 112 were members of the Windrush generation.⁴ From 2009 to 2019 the daily population of the UK detention estate ranged from 1,600 to 3,500, with around one third detained for more than 28 days. The estate is comprised of seven immigration removal centres (our primary concern in this article), alongside two short-term holding facilities, one pre-departure accommodation facility, and a number of holding rooms in airports, reporting centres and prisons. Other than in one case, the Home Office has outsourced the daily management of the immigration removal centres to private firms (Silverman et al., 2020).

Our emphasis is on the embodied, emotional experience of immigration detention. Our specific approach to grounded normative theory is solidaristic, informed by critical perspectives on immigration detention practices and taking insights from the emotional knowledge and views of detainees to better understand possibilities for systematic normative critique. Specifically, we sought to analyse the ways in which detainees emotionally framed their contact with the immigration detention estate. To analyse the testimonies, we implemented a framework based on Newman's 'emotional registers of discourse' (2012), where the stories told reveal the emotions being experienced.

We note that the operation of emotional affect at a pre-discursive, unconscious level presents challenges to the ways in which social scientists can come to research them. Autoethnography is often favoured as a means through which to analyse emotions first-hand (Beattie, 2019; Militz and Shurr, 2016), while others focus on narrative as an expression of, and sense-making process for, the experience of affect (Kleres, 2011; Tonkiss, 2021), and participants construct meaning through the stories that they tell to explain a particular experience (Boyer, 2012; Karakayali, 2017). This is a proxy for the real-time experience of emotion, where the focus is on the representation of emotion related to past events; that is, how people talk about a past experience and how they make sense of that experience. In this sense the memory also becomes an object to be interacted within the practice of emotion (see also Ahmed, 2014).

Following Newman, we focused our analysis on the framing of ‘emotion words’ such as ‘I felt’, ‘I was angry’, ‘it was unbearable’. We also focused on the use of metaphors which are often drawn upon for emotional expression (Verhoeven and Duyvendak, 2016), and the ways in which the self was understood through the eyes of others; for example, ‘he must have thought I was crazy’, as we observed that emotions were often conveyed through perceptions of the self and this also exposed the emotional effects arising from interactions with others as another form of object. We analysed the testimonies thematically, to identify the dominant emotional experiences of the detainees and former detainees.

Grounded Normative Theory and the Emotional Experience of Immigration Detention

In this section we draw on the findings of this case study to consider the ways in which recognising the centrality of emotion as an embodied aspect of moral claims making may add value to grounded normative theorizing. We make four inter-related claims, that including emotions:

- 1) expands comprehensiveness, offering valuable inputs and insights for normative argumentation;
- 2) helps to clarify the potential moral badness or unjustifiability of a state of affairs;
- 3) enables the theorist to enhance the persuasive power of her normative arguments; and
- 4) enhances accountability to those engaged in situated contexts of oppression and marginalisation.

Turning to our first claim, we argue that including emotions expands valuable inputs for normative argumentation. Grounded normative theory aims to enable the consideration of a more comprehensive range of claims, interests and actors in the development of normative arguments (Ackerly et al., 2021). Emotional knowledge is a fundamental knowledge of lived experience and offers a window into the embodied experience of marginalised populations (Nordberg, 2006; Vaditya, 2018) – that is, how they are affected by these experiences and how these experiences inform their explicit or implicit claims-making. As such, recognising and interrogating emotion offers the potential to enhance the comprehensiveness of the inputs considered in normative theory-building. Further, expressions of emotion – anger, resentment, grief, anxiety, empathy/sympathy/compassion, disgust, shame – can serve as triggers to deeper investigation. Why do certain persons or groups respond with certain intense emotions in relation to others, or to certain circumstances or issues? What are the underlying normative issues at stake, and how might such actors explain or defend the beliefs connected to their emotional responses?

In our case study analysis, we found emotion to be centrally integrated into moral reasoning, providing insights into perceptions of the context and how its dynamics affect individuals, including the discrete, multiple types of harms to which they may be subject. The testimonies contain direct claims for alternatives to detention, including letting people live with their family and friends, and claims that people seeking asylum should not be treated like

criminals but receive help with dignity, empathy and understanding. Informing and closely connected to these claims are complex emotional experiences not captured by a narrow focus on the expression of the claim.

In particular, our analysis shows an overarching theme of *dehumanisation* in these experiences. Haslam's seminal theorisation (2006) understands dehumanisation as the process by which individuals come to be disassociated from the attributes which make them human in the eyes of others. They may be seen to have attributes closer to that of animals or machines. Our analysis revealed the embodiment of this process, of *feeling* dehumanised through the practice of immigration detention. In a variety of narratives and forms of emotional expression, the testimonies describe the embodiment of feeling less than human as a result of contact with the immigration detention estate, and with regards to conditions in facilities.

Dehumanisation (Haslam, 2006) was apparent in a large number of the testimonies which detailed stories of being made to feel like an animal,⁵ or more broadly as lacking in human attributes. This point was often made with reference to living conditions, for example, the quality of accommodation provided or the food available, as in the following statement: '[t]he quality of the food in here is like we think that these people thinking we are dogs or animals' (anonymous 20).⁶ Being made to feel less than human was also apparent in consideration of the loss of freedom and personal agency. For example, anonymous 27 describes the experience of being handcuffed:

I felt so bad and intimidated, I was very angry. I couldn't think. I felt like I was a slave again, not even human. (anonymous 27)

This experience of such dehumanisation is a characteristic of the wider literature on immigration detention, which reports on the ways in which facilities are constructed to bring it about (DeBono, 2013; Hartley and Fleay, 2017). The emotional expression found in these testimonies highlights the embodiment of that practice as the central underpinning of claims

against immigration detention made by these detainees. Capturing these emotional expressions is in this sense integral to understanding fully the reasoning behind the claims being made.

Conclusions about right action are deeply informed not only by the analysis of ‘rational’ chains of thought from moral principle to case application, but by an understanding of the emotions at play before, during and after such chains of thought. As discussed again in the context of Nussbaum (2001; 2013), Jeffery (2014) and other authors here, emotions can be seen as fundamental to moral judgement. In this sense they are not separate from or additive to rational claims-making, but rather a core component of it that has been given little explicit emphasis in grounded normative theory accounts. In our case study, the detainees’ moral claims against the detention regime are deeply informed by their own experiences of dehumanisation and how this made them feel, as much as they are informed by concerns about the justifiability of indefinite arbitrary incarceration. As such, it would not be possible to fully understand this process of moral reasoning, and arguably the moral urgency of addressing it, without capturing and interrogating such emotional expression.

Moving onto our second claim, systematic attention to emotional expressions alongside claims of, for example, unfairness or arbitrariness, can help to clarify the potential moral badness of a state of affairs. This can again prompt the theorist to investigate more deeply. It can bring home the trauma inflicted on persons by some practices, and why we should reject such practices – not just because of concerns about injustice, but because they are physically and emotionally traumatic.

In our case study, the emotional experiences conveyed by the detainees powerfully highlight to the theorist and the reader why a practice such as detention of would-be migrants or people seeking asylum is not normatively justifiable, given that there are alternatives. For example, the animalistic dehumanisation found in the data is also linked to experiences of

shame and humiliation (Haslam, 2006), and such feelings were apparent particularly in the testimonies of women. These testimonies underscore a lack of privacy, in particular around male guards, and of the emotional impact of this. For example:

I had only one piece of underwear to wear – the others were too big. I had to ask male officers for more, it was so embarrassing to go to a man. And even then, you have to beg them because they don't listen to you. It took me a month to get some new underwear that I could wear. (anonymous 4)

Similar experiences were relayed by women of struggling to meet their basic needs. For example, a number of the testimonies describe a lack of menstrual products, with male guards gatekeeping access. Others mention having to have male guards accompany them to medical appointments. One describes in particularly vivid detail how guards refused her the opportunity to go to the toilet after returning from a hospital appointment for a pregnancy scan:

I stood in the reception and urinated on the floor where I was. My clothes were soaked with urine and I had no choice. Other detainees were removed from the area and I was left to feel dirty, humiliated and unworthy of humane treatment. (anonymous 10)

Another aspect of this shame was associated with the feeling of being criminalised. The embodiment of criminalisation was a recurrent theme in the testimonies, as anonymous 1 notes 'I felt like I was being treated like a criminal', and anonymous 27 describes 'I felt like I was being endlessly punished'. Anonymous 33 describes the relationship between this criminalisation and feelings of shame:

The trip to the hospital was humiliating in every possible way, I was handcuffed and escorted by both a female and a male police escort... she insisted on handcuffs, possibly due to the fact that she was with me alone, so embarrassing, even a 90 year old man looked at me with disgust. (anonymous 33)

This quote mirrors research pointing to the dehumanising experience of accessing healthcare in detention (Briskman, et al., 2012). Taken as a whole, these experiences of shame and humiliation highlight the ways in which the detainees were subjected to physical and emotional harm as a result of immigration detention arrangements, and how they experience detention as penal rather than solely administrative practice. They show the traumatic impact of detention and highlight strong reasons, beyond the moral arbitrariness of detention, as to why the practice cannot be justifiable in the presence of reasonable alternatives.

Such trauma, and the emotions of shame, humiliation and degradation associated with it, are readily accessible within a grounded normative investigation. They can serve again as signals or triggers for the theorist to delve more deeply into an empirical context and investigate the sources of the emotions. They also highlight reasons why a grounded normative approach stands to make important contributions to the study of emotions per se by normative political theorists, in particular the ways in which close study of a context and persons within it can highlight ways in which specific emotions are triggered within it.

To note, nothing in the present analysis indicates that the explicit or implicit claims and emotions identified in a given context must be treated as firm normative conclusions and prescriptions for action. Experiences and expressions can differ among actors, and their explicit claims often will conflict, especially if they are on either side of power divides. Nussbaum argues that central to the theorist's work is distinguishing between 'reasonable' and 'unreasonable' emotions, the latter including disgust (2004, Ch.2). For the grounded normative theorist, emotional expressions and related normative claims are again treated as inputs to inform the development of normative arguments, ideally in a recursive mode that involves repeated direct engagement and accountability to those engaged.

In turn, and coming to our third claim, exploring the traumatic impact of injustice and inequality also can enable the theorist to enhance the persuasive and potentially motivational

power of her normative arguments through connections between specific emotional expressions and reactions. For example, we might anticipate that the feelings of despair and dehumanisation found in the case study would form an object for the ‘tragic spectatorship’ (Boltanski, 1999) of the vulnerability of the suffering other. This, in turn, could bring about feelings of empathy, compassion, and anger at the status quo driving such injustice, in order to motivate action – to bring about affect, in the way Jeffery (2014, Ch. 7) and others highlight. Crucially, rather than pity for the distant oppressed, it involves the need for ‘fellow feeling’ – an acceptance of the full humanity of those suffering, which cannot come about without considering the embodied aspects of injustice and inequality (Sirreyeh, 2018). In Ahmed’s words, ‘[i]t is in the intensity of bodily responses to worlds that we make our judgements about worlds’ (2015, p.209). While we recognise the challenges inherent in bringing about an empathy which is genuinely connected to the lived experience of the suffering Other⁷ and not in some way romanticised (see also Szorenyi 2018), expressions of emotion are likely to bring an audience closer to the reality of the suffering and open up greater potential for ‘radical listening’ (Schick, 2019). In Ahmed’s words, ‘...starting with different emotions [is] a way of exploring different aspects of experience’ (2014, p.119).

Some particularly vivid descriptions of suffering are apparent within the case study as an object of this tragic spectatorship. For example, a second aspect of dehumanisation found in the analysis was inanimation, which we conceptualise as a form of mechanistic dehumanisation, where individuals are treated as though lacking in basic human nature, indistinct from machines and emotionally inert (Haslam, 2006). These feelings of inanimation are particularly apparent in the testimonies in relation to discussions of death and dying. These were most often conveyed with reference to the simultaneous feeling of being trapped, and as such again lacking agency. For example, as anonymous 9 describes:

I felt like a bird without wings... You are stuck there in detention: you cannot fight, you cannot fly. It feels like being a dead body. (anonymous 9)

Similarly, anonymous 11 describes how '[d]etention takes away your power, your confidence and makes you feel lifeless to yourself' and anonymous 33 asks '...where is my freedom, any freedom I have left is the freedom to breathe, but such constricted air, I prefer not'.

Death also emerged as a theme in relation to experiences of uncertainty, which is a key feature of the experience of immigration detention (Turnbull, 2016). Uncertainty arose in the testimonies due to a lack of clear time limits for detention, but also because decisions to move detainees to alternative facilities are common and detainees may be removed for deportation without notice. Anonymous 4 times this experience of uncertainty to death:

To me it feels like being on death row, and your execution is set for one day – you hear it is postponed, but the guards will still insist to show you the execution chamber. (anonymous 4)

Here, the death metaphor is invoked to convey the feeling among many of the detainees who were in the process of seeking asylum that to be deported would be to be subject to death. This feeling of abandonment to death (Khosravi, 2010) was also conveyed in relation to feelings of isolation, as anonymous 6 notes, '[t]hey just close the door on you and you are forgotten, and anonymous 16 describes not wanting to have access to a phone: ' I was better off without the phone, because all it did was remind me of how isolated and lonely I was'. Combined, these examples demonstrate the mechanistic dehumanisation experienced in the detention centre, but they also provide a particular stark illustration of the despair that the detainees experienced. This is a more vivid rendering of moral issues arising from immigration detention than could be gained from describing salient rights claims alone.

Turning to our fourth and final claim, looking beyond a singular focus on a supposedly rational ‘voice’ and towards the emotionality articulated in processes of claims-making offers an avenue through which to expand our understanding of the experience of injustice and inequality (Chadwick, 2021). This can enhance accountability to those engaged in situated contexts of oppression and marginalisation by encouraging the theorist to take into account emotions, including potentially ones relates to engagement with research itself.

The emotional knowledge of oppression, such as that surrounding dehumanisation found in our analysis of the testimonies of immigration detainees, is not something typically accessible to the researcher. For example, neither of the authors of this article have experience of being held in an immigration detention facility. This raises epistemological questions concerning how normative theorists can come to know about such an experience. Indeed, normative theorising, depending on the approach, may marginalise and exclude voices and ways of knowing from the theorisation process, in particular the embodied experience of oppression and domination. This means that this knowledge is excluded from the process of imagining radical alternatives to the current situation.

Rather, theorising is dominated by the perspectives of those who have benefitted from the global division of wealth and resources (Cole, 2017). This has particular ramifications when considering that the contemporary global order is shaped around legacies (and contemporary realities) of colonialism (El-Enany, 2020; Mayblin, 2019), meaning that this silencing is also distinctly racialised, and that traumas associated with colonialism itself are silenced in theory-building practices (Craps, 2015). With regards to our case study, for example, we know that Black people are more likely to be detained, that they are detained for far longer than White people (Townsend, 2020), and that immigration and asylum routes are deeply shaped by colonial legacies of the British empire (Walia, 2021).

Accountability in general has been a central focus for grounded normative theory, particularly in the investigation of the rights claims of oppressed and marginalised people, where the theorist seeks to bring their voices into the theory-building process. This involves learning how to hear, in Spivak's terms, the 'subaltern' (Spivak, 1993; see also Beattie, 2019). Such a commitment is manifest in theorists seeking to understand and capture fully those lived realities in normative theorising, while considering the impact of their own typically privileged positionality on their interpretations and responses (Britton, 2019). In the context of the present discussion, it also would involve challenging grounded normative theorists to look beyond what is expressed in the rational-chain-of-thought form familiar to normative claims-making, toward a more holistic understanding of the expression of such claims as deeply connected to emotions.

The emotions expressed in the testimonies discussed in this article have not been experienced by the authors of the article, sitting on the outside looking in at the experience of immigration detention. Alongside the particularly vivid tragic spectatorship driven by the emotional expressions, then, is a stark illustration of the embodied knowledge of detention that is far removed from the knowledge on which theorists typically draw when they explore its normative justifiability. It brings about in the theorist her own emotional response of empathy, compassion and outrage, which itself is part of the theory-building process. That is not as an add-on to a rational, impartial normative process, but rather a recognition that for the theorist – just like those in the situated context of immigration detention – emotion *is* a part of the process of normative theory-building.

Conclusion

In this article, we have worked to show the contribution that emotions research can make to grounded normative theorising. Despite its concern for the exploration of lived experience, grounded normative theory has paid scant explicit attention to emotions. We sought to demonstrate the relevance of emotions research to grounded normative theory through an illustrative case study of the emotional experience of immigration detention in the UK, and to use this illustrative example to examine the value added to a grounded normative theory account by the inclusion of emotional expression into the theorising process.

Through this example analysis of the emotional registers of discourse found in forty anonymous testimonies of individuals held in the British immigration detention estate, we argued that the systematic incorporation of data on emotional expressions can significantly strengthen grounded normative theory accounts focused on qualitative field research. We presented four inter-related claims concerning the potential value added to the grounded normative theory approach by a more explicit emphasis on expressions of emotion as an embodied aspect of moral claims making. Specifically, we argued that including such emphasis on emotions 1) expands valuable inputs for normative argumentation; 2) helps to clarify the potential normative unjustifiability of a state of affairs; 3) enables the theorist to enhance the persuasive power of her normative arguments; and 4) enhances accountability to those engaged in situated contexts of oppression and marginalisation.

Overall, the article has highlighted integral connections between emotions and moral claims making, and indicated some directions for how the study of emotions could be incorporated into grounded normative theory projects. A further implication of the discussion here is that normative political theory accounts focused on emotions and moral claims could themselves be significantly enhanced through the incorporation of grounded normative methods.

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¹ Nussbaum 2007 is included here as a grounded normative theory account because its analysis is informed by interviews she conducted with a few principal figures on the Hindu-nationalist right in India. Some other works

by Nussbaum noted here have elements of autoethnography (2001), but they would not generally be situated in a grounded normative theory framework.

² For recent examples see Ahall (2018); Coffey (2020); Chadwick (2021).

³ A feminist critique also levelled against canonical political theory (see Hutchings and Owens, 2021).

⁴ The 'Windrush generation' refers to people who (or whose parents) came to the UK as Commonwealth citizens and have lived in the UK in many cases all their lives, but who were not provided with full citizenship status when laws changed in the late 1960s. It was not seen as necessary to change their status, but these individuals have been detained and in some cases deported since the introduction of the government's 'hostile environment' policy aimed at deterring migration, because they were unable to provide evidence of citizenship.

⁵ We follow Haslam's and the testimonies' distinctions here, but no categorical divide is implied with regard to the treatment or worth of human and non-human animals.

⁶ We follow the source material in referring to respondents as 'Anonymous' with a document number. All of the anonymous testimonies referred to in the paper are available at <https://detentioninquiry.com/submitted-evidence/written-evidence/>

⁷ And, indeed, that this is impacted by a racialisation of emotions – the process through which race comes to be taken as a factor in determining an emotional experience of a given context (Ahmed, 2014; Ngai, 2005). This may be a particularly acute problem with regards to an issue such as detention in a majority White country such as the UK, where the majority of immigrant detainees are people of colour.