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Audible citizenship and the politics of listening within two refugee and asylum-seeker services in Greater Manchester.

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Human Geography in the School of Environment, Education and Development.

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This thesis argues for the need to develop a politics of listening attuned to the visceral nature of communicative encounters in order to explore the affective economies of auditory experience. It does so by drawing on a sonic ethnography conducted within two refugee and asylum-seeker services in Greater Manchester to understand how the state listens and how everyday interactions within semi-institutional spaces come to be imbued with state affects whilst still holding the potential to challenge such power structures. Across this thesis, listening is conceived of as an intersubjective and sensuous act of citizenship through which modes of belonging and community are negotiated and public space is co-constituted by diverse actors. Sound will be understood as a visceral phenomena and listening responses as both unpredictable and uncomfortable. What creates a sense of coherence or solidarity between some could provoke feelings of unease in others, and therefore, can be equally felt as a disruptive noise. To explore the listening cultures of the two refugee and asylum-seeker services, a sonic ethnographic research design has been developed that proposes three inter-related methods of listening. The research practices are Dialogic, Ambient and Layered listening. These three listening practices shape a mixed methods research design that incorporates traditional methods such as observer-participation, informal conversations and semi-structured interviews alongside more experimental approaches such as auto-ethnographic sound writing and audio recording. The overall aims of this thesis are to get to grips with the political possibilities of listening within everyday spaces and how such encounters disrupt how the state listens and how counter-public spaces come into being through ordinary acts that challenge the wider hostile environment towards migrants in the UK.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

Dedication

I would like to thank my supervisors Dr Jonathan Darling, Dr Jamie Doucette and Dr Helen F. Wilson for their support and critical ears throughout this project. This thesis would have been impossible without the further support and generosity of all the staff, volunteers and attendees of both the Advice Service and the Drop-in. I appreciate the time taken out of your busy schedules and lives to participate in the making of this work and for trusting me with your stories. I would like to thank my partner Dr Hannah Ellul-Knight, for her encouragement and support; without which, I don't think I would have even got my act together to even apply for a PhD. Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my daughter, Corra Varda Ellul-Knight, who was born on the 13th July 2019 and who slept on my chest in a papoose when making the final drafts of this thesis.

**About the author**

Prior to undertaking this PhD, the author completed undergraduate studies in English Literature at the University of Sussex and a masters degree in Modern Literature at the University of Glasgow. They have also worked within community libraries in Glasgow and trained as a social worker at Manchester Metropolitan University, subsequently working as a social worker in a community setting with people with learning disabilities and in a hospital. It is through library and social work that the author began volunteering with refugee and asylum-seeker services. Now residing in Glasgow, the author is on the organising committee of the Unity Centre, which offers practical support and solidarity to refugees and asylum-seekers. The author also works as a musician and performance artist and has released an LP of a voice play about caring work of all kinds with Calling Cards Publishing (December 2019).

Prelude

'What would happen if you set up a wind chime, just outside the office?'

A speculative question that was meant seriously, but said with a humorous tone. Penny, one of the advice workers and project coordinator at the Drop-in was musing about how a layer of calm could be introduced to the general sonic melee of the main hall. At the time the capacity of the service was stretched and this could be heard in the sonic intensity of the room.

Set above the main entrance, between the reception (at which I sat every morning with at least one other volunteer) and the office used for advice appointments; the wind chime would be one of the first sounds heard on entering. Its thin hollow tubes ringing out; creating a 'new age' ambience of metallic good vibes that would be heard by those who enter and linger by the office waiting to catch the ear of an advice worker or volunteer.

'Maybe you could get funding to buy us one?'.

I laughed, I suppose I could. A social experiment in the making: wind chimes strategically placed around the hall and observed in order to understand how they affected the environment. It didn't happen, but Penny's musings did reveal a concern that was more widely felt about the intensity of the room and the particular space at the entrance, which came up in conversation a lot. Penny described this area as the log-jam, because people who didn't have an appointment would stand there waiting to address one of the workers or volunteers. It was also were people entered and signed-in at the reception. People were supposed to pass through smoothly, but some stubborn bodies disrupted the flow of attendees who came in through the main door, signed at reception and then carried on into the hall.

The Drop-in only has one dedicated office for advice work (the wind chimes would be opposite), so appointments also took place behind partitions at the back of the main hall. Meaning that workers and volunteers would often find themselves walking back and forth across the hall; when they did so, they would have to navigate the log-jam.

Salma, one of the advice workers, said that when she encountered one of the attendees who lingered by the office, she would try not to make eye-contact with them, so as not to be drawn into a conversation. She said that she hated to do this, she didn't want to appear to be ignoring their concerns. But if she did engage them, she would loose her thread and neglect the appointment she was already engaged in.

The general sonic intensity, the bodies and extra questions made it a difficult environment in which to listen but it was this ambience - its ordinary ongoingness of people chatting in different languages, the familial sounds of children playing and the smells and sounds of lunch being prepared are part of the Drop-in's appeal. But, sometimes the waves of intensity that circulate between the different bodies are what makes it difficult to listen. The wind chimes were a half-serious suggestion; a way of subtly altering the ambience to manage the feelings and emotions that people brought with them to the Drop-in. Flatten them out a little.

This anecdote is taken from one of the services that this thesis focuses upon and it represents one of the key concerns of this project: how more intimate encounters unfold in   public spaces and how these different dimensions co-constitute each other. In the improvised social spaces of refugee and asylum-seeker services, the ambient sounds of other people chatting in different languages, people moving between, plates clattering and the echo of the architecture of the building imbue the more intimate encounters. Therefore, listening involves negotiating the visceral sounds resonating throughout our bodies and other bodies: all the voices, materials, languages, para-languages, heartbeats, heavy breathing, fingers tapping, sweating.

Introduction

One of the aims of this thesis is to explore the listening cultures of two refugee and asylum-seeker organisations based in Greater Manchester. It will argue for the need to develop a sensuous politics of listening attuned to the lively sonic environments of ordinary encounters. In doing so, this thesis will demonstrate how acts of listening across difference challenges the dominant norms of audibility that define the hostile socio-political environment, where immigration is understood as a threat and disturbance to the national order of things.

The two organisations that this study focuses on will be referred to anonymously as the Drop-in and the Advice Service. Also, all participants referred to (such as Penny in the prelude) are pseudonyms and a glossary of participants is provided in the appendix of this thesis. These two organisations are part of a wider network of services that act as sympathetic 'listening posts' within communities across the UK where there are populations of refugees and asylum-seekers[1]. This wider network of organisations, based within rented office spaces, the community hubs of churches and mosques and other community spaces, provide much needed advocacy and practical support, social activities, free communal lunches, English lessons and space to drink tea and chat. Organisations such as the Drop-in and the Advice Service enact an everyday politics of care that is independent from but intimately entwined with the asylum regime in the UK because they often speak on behalf of asylum-seekers when liaising with the Home Office.

The central tension explored in this thesis is how organisations such as the Drop-in and the Advice Service negotiate the bureaucracy of the UK asylum regime, whilst still holding the political possibility to challenge such power imbalances. The following three questions structure the argument that will be developed across this thesis.

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[1] 'Listening post' is a terms used by the sociologist Les Back (2007) to describe the network of 'churches, mosques and temples' that assisted refugees and asylum-seekers in South London at the time of his involvement with them. It is an apt term to adopt here because of its geographical suggestion: a listening post as an outpost within a local area where people within the asylum system can go when they have nowhere else to turn. The Drop-in and the Advice Service can be described as sympathetic outposts within the wider hostile environment.

- What listening practices shape the everyday spaces of refugee and asylum-seeker support services?

- How do practices of listening in these spaces disrupt the norms of audibility that, in part, structure the wider hostile environment towards refugees and asylum-seekers in the UK?

- Can audible forms of citizenship create forms of belonging that escape the top-down, exclusionary forms of citizenship enacted by the nation-state?

This introduction shall begin with the wider context of the asylum regime in the UK; it will situate my thesis within the fields of political and asylum geographies and discuss what a politics of deep listening can contribute to existing research. It will also consider what possibilities there are for feeding back into refugee and asylum-seeker organisations. In the second section, an overview of each of the five chapters will be provided, which will begin to address the questions above and some of the key concepts of this thesis. The third and final section will act as an introduction to the concepts and practices of listening that this thesis will explore by recounting of trip to the National Gallery in London and an encounter with Pieter de Hooch's painting, *The Courtyard of a House in Delft* (1658). This painting offered some insight into listening and the everyday at an early point of my research project and I explore it here before beginning the first chapter on Deep Listening.

I began this thesis in September 2016, in the fallout from the European (EU) Referendum and its toxic campaign where anti-immigrant sentiment was mobilised by elite politicians advocating for leaving the EU. One infamous example was UKIPs

'Breaking Point' poster campaign that claimed that the European Union has failed 'us' and that it was time for the UK to 'take back control'.



Figure 1. 'Breaking Point' campaign poster promoted by UKIP leader Nigel Farage (2016).

The image on the poster stoked the fears of increasing immigration and used as its basis a photograph of a long line of what appear to be refugees. The poster campaign obviously sought to channel the fears around increased migration after 2015 and the rise in refugees in Europe due to the Syrian Civil War. On Twitter, a chilling comparison was made between the UKIP poster campaign and the film footage (with subtitles) of Nazi propaganda of refugees after the 1914-18 War in Europe. The social media collage highlights a disturbing continuity and the re-surfacing of well worn racist tropes…

    'BREAKING POINT'                                 'who flooded Europe's cities

                                                      After the last war -

                                              Parasites undermining…'

The Nazi propaganda uses the language of 'floods' and 'parasites' to describe Jewish migration and the 'Breaking Point' image uses a similar language that constructs a damaging 'us' versus 'them' dynamic that, supposedly, threatens the status quo of UK/Europe as a peaceful, prosperous democracy. However, in the UKIP poster it is the UK that is at breaking point and the EU is the governing administration that is the problem (see Jones 2017; Smith & Deacon 2018; Zappettini & Krzyzanowski 2019).

I would like to add an anecdote to this composition to introduce the context of the asylum regime and how it is imbricated with the hostility towards immigrants depicted in this poster campaign. Before I started my thesis, I was already volunteering with the Advice Service providing practical advice and support for asylum-seekers who wanted to apply for financial support and accommodation from the Home Office.

In the summer of 2016, one of the appointments I had was with an asylum-seeker family who planned to travel to the Advice Service from Wigan but they did not show up for their meeting. On calling them to ask if they were okay, I spoke to the father who said that they didn't want to make the journey on public transport because they didn't feel safe to travel. They felt threatened. The father's anecdote offers some insight into the wider socio-political climate that informs the work of refugee and asylum-seeker organisations in the UK and a public sphere that is shaped by a hostile environment.

The anecdote is a personal recollection of a moment where harmful anti-immigrant feelings surfaced within the Advice Service. Also it is one informal example that speaks to a sense of the wider hostile environment towards refugees and asylum-seekers in the UK. Alex Mik (2013) writes that in 2013, the 'Hostile Environment Working Group' was established within the Home Office with the intention of increasing 'voluntary return' amongst refugees who no longer have the right to remain in the UK (Free Movement 2013)[2]. In the same year, another Home Office initiative included the widely

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[2] The Home Office will assist migrants in the UK who make an application to return to their 'home' country. This process is called 'Voluntary Return'.

condemned 'Go Home' immigration enforcement vans, which were deployed in areas with high populations of immigrants displaying the message: 'In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest' (Bulman 2019). Combined with these acts, legislation such as the 2014 Immigration Act and then the Immigration Bill of 2015, extended the hostile environment into everyday life; creating a sprawling web of immigration controls embedded within public services (such as the NHS), whilst asking landlords and employers to check the documents of tenants and employees (Liberty 2018: 5, see also Goodfellow 2019). Moreover, the Immigration Bill was brought into law in a post-EU referendum climate in which a spike of racist attacks had occurred after a political moment defined by racist campaigns led by elite politicians (Institute of Race Relations 2016).

The instigation of the hostile environment highlights the institutionally racist mechanisms of the Home Office that again entered the public sphere in 2018 with what is now know as the the 'Windrush scandal'. Through the hostile environment policies, people from the UK's Afro-Carribean communities who were British subjects born before 1973, were targeted with unlawful detention and removal to nations they had either never visited or left when they were young (see Gentleman 2019).

In the context of a wider hostile environment in the UK, where refugees and asylum-seekers can be denounced as bogus in the media, are subject to dispersal, cannot access NHS treatment, and have limited access to formal education and language classes; organisations such as the Advice Service and the Drop-in provide vital services, advocacy and social and community spaces that facilitate 'a place for people to relate to others and simply be' (Conradson 2003: 521). Both the Drop-in and the Advice Service can be described as semi-institutional spaces that provide safe, welcoming spaces for refugees and asylum-seekers but they also provide necessary advocacy and practical support where they have to work within the confines of the policy and administrative systems of the Home Office. The next section will introduce the social and legislative context in more detail. The following overview is important as it relates to the everyday, routine work of both organisations and therefore, it will be interpreted in the three empirical chapters.

The Drop-in organisation works with people legally defined as 'asylum seekers', 'refugees' and others who do not fit neatly into either category to provide social space, advice and advocacy for all who need it. The legal definition of an asylum seeker is 'a person who has left their country of origin and formally applied for asylum in another country but whose application has not yet been concluded' (Refugee Council 2019).When someone claims asylum in the UK, they legally take on the identity of an asylum-seeker as a legally defined position. If that person then has their asylum claim accepted by the Home Office it means that they are granted refugee status, where 'the Home Office recognises them as a refugee as described in the Refugee Convention'[3].

The refugee attendees of the Drop-in have to navigate the vagaries of mainstream benefits (such as Universal Credit and Housing Benefit)[4]. Asylum-seekers are excluded from these benefits as they have 'no recourse to public funds' and therefore, receive accommodation and financial support under the regulation of the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act (1999 Act). The 1999 Act is one of the central policy contexts for this thesis and it will be discussed in relation to the following introduction of the Advice Service.

The Advice Service is a project run by a larger national organisation and the services it provides are more formal than the Drop-in. It focuses on providing advice and advocacy for individual asylum-seekers and families who are waiting for a decision on their asylum claim as well as those who have had their first asylum claim rejected by the Home Office but are unable to return to the country that the Home Office believes them to be from.

When the Advice Service meets with a 'client' they are usually at a point of crisis - facing financial destitution and/or homelessness - and the project assists them with

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[3] In the UK, the Home Office is the ministerial department responsible for immigration and state security. The definitions used here were taken from: Refugee Council Glossary of Terminology (2018).

[4] In the UK, Universal Credit is a social security benefit that was introduced in 2013 by the Conservative Government and implemented in stages. For more information on the roll out of Universal Credit, please see: 'Universal Credit Timetable', accessed Sept 04, 2018, https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/universal_credit_housing_costs/universal_credit_timetable

accessing the financial and accommodation support they are entitled to under the 1999 Act. Under the terms of the 1999 Act this support is covered by Section 95 and 98[5]. The 1999 Act states that if asylum claimants are to become 'street homeless' or 'destitute' within 14 days they are entitled to financial and accommodation support (UK Gov 2019). UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) is the department of the Home Office that deals with asylum applications and the National Asylum Support Service (NASS support) is the part that administers Section 95 and 98 accommodation and financial support.

Section 95 of the 1999 Act provides accommodation and basic living expenses of £37.75 for each person in a household (UK Gov 2019). This amounts to £5 per day and is currently 52% of income support levels for a single adult who receives mainstream unemployment benefit (see City of Sanctuary 2019). If an asylum-seeker is at immediate risk of homelessness (before the 14 day period has elapsed) then the Home Office should provide immediate temporary accommodation under Section 98 (see Right To Remain Toolkit 2019). Accommodation is allocated on a 'no choice' basis; meaning that those who have claimed asylum have no say in where they live and can be dispersed to anywhere in the UK, including the Greater Manchester area where this thesis is based (Right To Remain 2019). Dispersal programmes are present within the asylum regimes of other European nations (such as Denmark and Germany), and the UK dispersal regime has been thoroughly criticised for marginalising asylum seekers (see Bloch & Schuster 2002; Darling 2017, Lyons 2018). The marginalisation of asylum-seekers is designed to exclude those who claim asylum from employment, from mainstream benefits such as Universal Credit, and from local authority housing and homeless shelters (Mayblin 2014). These policies create a parallel second-tier benefits and accommodation bureaucracy that separates citizens and non-citizens, 'us' from 'them'.

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[5] Please note: the 1999 Act and Section 95 and 98 will be referred to in these abbreviated forms throughout this thesis. However, at certain point, the full name of the acts and sections will be clarified again to avoid confusion.

Responding to the exclusionary nature of the 1999 Act, Alice Bloch and Liza Schuster write that:

> 'the welfare state acts, in part, as an agent that defines who is a member of the nation state and who is not. Historically, access to welfare has been governed by criteria such as residency, nationality and citizenship'.
> (2002: 395).

The 1999 Act initiated a second-tier welfare system for asylum-seekers that was part of the New Labour Government's 'new asylum regime' that was, in part, a governmental response to the political and media discourse that had a damaging influence on the public sphere. The anti-immigrant sentiment that charged the socio-political climate in the run-up to the 1999 Act is encapsulated by the then, Conservative leader William Hague, who declared that: 'Britain is a soft touch for asylum-seekers' (Ward 1999). Bloch and Schuster's research affirms an anti-migrant political discourse that was reinforced by the media who used terms such as frauds, parasites, benefit cheats and economic refugees to describe asylum-seekers (2002: 406). These media responses resonate with the  racist tropes mobilised by the pro-Brexit billboards discussed earlier, thus reinforcing the idea that asylum-seekers are welfare scroungers and are not necessarily deserving of 'our' hospitality or humanitarian protection.

The New Labour government introduced policies such as the 1999 Act in order to appear tough on immigration in a socio-political climate charged with anti-immigration sentiment. Thus, it mobilised a debilitating 'us' versus 'them' politics that is part of a historical continuum that aims to create clear differences between those who do and those who don't belong to a particular nation-state (Winder 2004). Modern immigration policy, formed along these discriminating lines, can be traced back to the 1905 Aliens Act that declared that 'undesirable immigrants' would be denied entry to Britain. The act was a response to Jewish and Eastern European migrants escaping the Russian Pogroms (Gatrell 2008).

An understanding of the anti-immigrant rhetoric in the wider public sphere is important for this thesis as it demonstrates how everyday acts of listening and speaking across difference can be distorted. Discriminatory sentiments and feelings circulate and they can, even unwittingly, charge how we respond to others. Although organisations such as the Drop-in and the Advice Service provide safe spaces within a wider hostile environment they are imbricated within the asylum regime; particularly as they liaise with the Home Office on behalf of their clients. The next section will discuss two critical dilemmas of liaising with the Home Office that will be articulated through a politics of listening in this thesis.

Refugee and asylum-seeker services exist in a precarious present where they provide much needed services and social space in a wider hostile environment. This thesis will explore this present through two main dilemmas faced by the Advice Service and the Drop-in: the first, is how such organisations, even though independent from the Home Office, can become uneasy allies with the government. The second, is how this dynamic shapes the caring relations performed within such spaces and the dilemmas caused by the  power imbalances of empathising for and with others.

The dilemma of acting as uneasy allies with the government is woven into the 1999 Act. In 1998, before the legislation was released, New Labour published *Fairer, Faster, Firmer: a Modern Approach to Immigration and Asylum*, a white paper that stated: 'the government is particularly concerned to explore ways of harnessing the energy and expertise of voluntary and independent sector bodies in providing support for asylum-seekers' (Home Office 1998). During this period, the Advice Service was a member of the Asylum Support Action Group and endorsed the voluntary sector's involvement in the support scheme set out by *Fairer, Faster, Firmer*. Until 2010, the Advice Service held a Home Office contract to provide the 'One Stop Service' that provided practical support and advocacy for asylum-seekers[6].

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[6] The creation of immigration controls under New Labour connects to wider discussions about the neoliberal re-construction of public services and the voluntary sector (see Jenkins 2005).

Discussing the alliance between the state and voluntary sectors, Steve Cohen writes that, although…

> 'there is nothing necessarily wrong in principle for the voluntary sector to accept government monies for projects […] it does require constant political vigilance to ensure that the source of funding does not constrain its use'.
> (2002: 152)

Cohen's articulation resonates with Michael Lipsky's (1980) influential study of 'street-level bureaucrats': a term used to describe teachers, social workers and health workers amongst other professionals who work directly with the public. Although the case of asylum-seeker services is different because the nation-state doesn't consider asylum-seekers as citizens, the 'street-level bureaucrat' is an apt reference as in Lipsky's terms, such workers: 'orient and provide the social (and political) contexts in which people act. Thus every extension of service benefits is accompanied by an extension of state influence and control' (Lipsky 1980: 4). Therefore, taking on a Home Office contract provided some financial security for the Advice Service but it also caused a dilemma as it could potentially limit the ability of the service to act as an independent advocate and to challenge the bureaucracy of asylum in which they are intimately enmeshed.

The second dilemma concerns the contested politics of caring encounters. It draws upon valuable work within political geographies (Darling 2010) and mental health geographies (Parr 2000) that focus on the power dynamics of providing support to communities of people that are often understood to be marginalised from wider society. Drawing on ethnographic research into a Drop-in centre for asylum-seekers, Jonathan Darling (2010) writes about how the political dynamics of these services can actively re-inscribe problematic understandings of charity, belonging and citizenship.

If the listening responses of volunteers or advice workers were to be considered; the audible norms of such relationships might generate a sense of pity, or even feelings of superiority 'because the giving self feels actively compassionate, whilst the receiving

other is pitied and thus passive' (Korf 2007: 370). One of the aims of this thesis is to advance a form of sonic ethnography that is reflexive enough to attune to the micro-politics of everyday encounters and how certain debilitating power dynamics constitute how we listen in the lively and often intense social environments of refugee and asylum-seeker services. Listening as an ethico-political act will be interpreted throughout this thesis, but it will be most explicitly addressed in the empirical chapters.

This thesis is written from a position of solidarity with refugees and asylum-seekers and the organisations that provide support and services. However, it is important to strike a critical tone and negotiate the ethical and political realities of the Advice Service and the Drop-in. State practices suffuse the everyday workings of both organisations and by observing and reflecting on how this occurs in each organisation it is possible to explore how the state listens and speaks through each organisation. In part, the state defines the norms of audibility through which volunteers, advice workers and volunteers are able to listen across difference. Therefore it is important to understand what charges certain listening responses and to what extent is it possible to challenge the debilitating power dynamics of the asylum regime.

This thesis draws on and advances recent work within geographies of asylum (Bloch & Giorgia 2018; Gill 2010; Darling 2017). The insight that this thesis offers is an understanding of an auditory dimension to approaches to 'critical asylum geography' (Gill 2010) and the 'affective economies' of asylum bureaucracy (Ahmed 2004). Nick Gill uses the term 'critical asylum geography' to place emphasis on the importance of everyday situated practices and how they can work towards re-producing the state (2010: 638). Therefore, my own intervention draws upon Gill's (2010) notion whilst connecting to other research that focuses on everyday geographies of refugee and asylum-seeker services. It does so to develop an understanding of listening as a sensuous ethico-politcal act within everyday spaces[7]. State borders spread beyond the boundaries of the nation-state and are technologically sophisticated, but they also work on intimate levels, imbuing mundane and routine practices. What this thesis contributes

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[7] For more on everyday geographies of asylum  please see: Askins (2016); Darling (2014) Huizinga & Bettina (2018) and Leitner & Ehrkamp (2006).

to the wider literature on the geographies of asylum is an everyday cultural account of refugee and asylum-seeker services. Furthermore, listening should also be understood as a conceptual and methodological vehicle that can be adapted to different research contexts. For example: it could be developed to explore the everyday geographies within a homelessness Drop-in centre or activist groups working with communities on particular local issues, such as the effects of austerity or rights to social housing.

Another area of research that this thesis contributes to is the discipline of sonic geographies.  Writing in 1994, Susan J. Smith (1994) commented on the relative silence of the postmodern turn in cultural geographies, challenging the discipline to find ways of listening to the social world that have the same 'integrity, plausibility, and legitimacy as are currently afforded to knowledge produced through looking' (2000: 615). It is a response that echoes Jacques Attali's statement that 'the world is not for beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible' (1985: 3). Smith's (1994; 2000) research resonates with the burgeoning discipline of sonic geographies and geographies of listening that this thesis aims to contribute towards and expand upon[8]. The significant contribution that this thesis makes is to outline a conceptual and methodological framework for exploring the listening cultures of the everyday spaces of refugee and asylum-seeker services. To do so, it will discuss how listening encounters shape such services and how these everyday practices disrupt the norms of audibility that, in part, structure the wider hostile environment towards refugees and asylum-seekers in the UK. Thus, creating an auditory dimension to everyday geographies of refugee and asylum-seeker services that stresses that stress that sonic research into culture can tell 'different kinds of stories to other media', tuning into the more liminal 'hidden or marginal aspects of places and their inhabitants' (Prior & Gallagher 2014: 268).

This thesis is structured into five different chapters; Chapter 1 introduces 'Deep listening' as a container for the conceptual and methodological underpinnings of the thesis. It explores a theoretical approach to understanding listening as sensuous,

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[8] For an in-depth overview of research with sonic and listening geographies please see: Bennett et al (2014); Butler & Miller (2005); Connell & Gibson (2004); Duffy & Waitt (2013); Hughes (2016); Kanngieser (2012); Prior & Gallagher (2013); Waldock (2016); Wilson (2016).

intersubjective ethico-political act attuned to the affective capacities of the sonic environment. *Chapter 2: Learning to Listen* advances an inter-related methodological approach towards Deep listening.

The next three chapters are dedicated to empirical analysis: Chapter 3 covers 'Empathetic listening', Chapter 4 focuses on 'Bureaucratic listening' and Chapter 5 discusses 'Ambient listening'. Each chapter represents a particular listening act performed by staff, volunteers and refugee and asylum-seeker attendees of both organisations. It is important to understand that these three listening practices are inter-related, for example: there can be empathy in how an individual listens to the narrative of an asylum-seeker, whilst listening bureaucratically to assist them with completing a Section 95 application. Moreover, such encounters unfold in an ambient environment that weighs upon the interaction. One of the main aims of the empirical chapters is to reflect upon how these different practices of listening are woven together in order to understand listening as a sensuous ethico-political act. The rest of this section will give a clear outline of each of the five chapters.

*Chapter 1: Deep listening* introduces the container of Deep listening as the conceptual-methodological framework for this thesis. The chapter sets out the key theories and scholars from a wide range of disciplines. It includes those drawn from political theory (Bickford 1996); sociology (Back 2007; Bassel 2017), Western experimental music (Oliveros 2005) and sonic geographies (Gallagher et al 2017). Conceptually, this inter-disciplinary exploration outlines three key terms that are part of the later empirical investigation. Including a section covering 'Deep listening', another on the 'micro-politics of listening' and how an understanding of listening as an ethico-political act can be understood via the term 'audible citizenship'.

Via an engagement with these sub-concepts, this chapter tackles two of the main questions that were introduced earlier: what does it mean to listen deeply to the social world and how can a politics of listening disrupt the norms of audibility defined by the nation-state? What becomes clear in this chapter is that this thesis develops a form of listening attention that is interested in verbal and non-verbal communication, whilst

attuning to more ephemeral aspects of sound. Such as the way emotions charge encounters with others and how the materiality and architecture of a space can amplify sound and transform encounters.

*Chapter 2: Learning to listen*, extends the container of Deep listening by developing a sonic ethnographic method composed of established and experimental methods that underpin listening as an important approach to 'sensory ethnography' (Pink 2015). This chapter stages an important methodological intervention as auditory methods have been neglected within approaches to sensory ethnography that tend to favour the visual (Gershon 2013).

Methodological practices that call for more 'extended' listening can also be heard within approaches to sonic geography (Gallagher et al 2017) and this chapter will discuss how my own research design resonates with wider geographical scholarship. In doing so, the chapter sets out three inter-related methods of listening as a researcher, which are: *Dialogical*, *Ambient* and *Layered listening*. To do so, the chapter engages  with feminist and post-colonial approaches to ethnography in order to develop the tripartite position of the researcher who listens as a researcher-volunteer-friend. The main aim of this chapter is to develop a framework for conducting sonic ethnography and to understand how researchers can learn and unlearn ways of listening as an embodied process attuned to communicative interaction and the affective atmospheres that envelope and fine-tune encounters with difference.

As a transition between the first two chapters and the beginning of the empirical chapters there will be an Interlude which will feature a listening exercise from Pauline Oliveros' 'Deep Listening' practice. The purpose of these exercises will be to create a space between the different objectives of the chapters. The purpose of providing this space is to invite the reader to engage in listening actively in the moment and not just read about someone else's listening experience.

The exercises provide a space in which to listen to your own environment and the different layers of sound and the voices that abound in-and-around you and how these

interact with your internal voice and the thoughts you may have on the material you've been reading. For myself, the exercises are a demonstration of the importance of the inter-relation between the practice of listening and the concepts that can influence how listening is developed within this thesis. A relation that is integral to the first two chapters and beyond into the empirical discussions.

*Chapter 3: Empathetic listening.* As with each of the three practices of listening, this chapter begins with a short definition of Empathetic listening. The aim of this chapter is to explore how empathy is practiced and understood as part of the caring labour performed by advice workers, volunteers and refugee and asylum-seeker attendees who contributed to this ethnography. To do so, this chapter explores Empathetic listening as a practice of relationship building/repair and for its world-making capacities. This chapter engages with the micro-politics of listening and the dilemma of caring relationships that was discussed earlier in this introduction. It is a power dynamic that upholds a patrician attitude that denies the so-called service-user a sense of agency in their own lives. Alternatively, this chapter advances findings that demonstrate the importance of attuning to discordant feelings and atmospheres that can reveal how refugees and asylum-seekers negotiate relationships and affective barriers in ways that challenge the caring/cared for dichotomy.

*Chapter 4: Bureaucratic listening*, covers how participants listen with and to others whilst negotiating the administrative and legalistic procedures that are part of communicating with the Home Office. This chapter focuses on how the Advice Service and the Drop-in act as intermediaries/advocates between the asylum-seeker client and UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI). The discussion of Bureaucratic listening enhances the findings in the previous chapter by focusing on the Bureaucratic as a complex assemblage. One that includes: face-to-face encounters and the wider network of other state listeners, the latter whose presence is made through the disembodied voices of a telephone call and other materials and technologies such as emails, letters from the Home Office, application forms and interview recordings. This chapter advances the concept of the listening state, and how people come to listen like the state. It will explore the possibilities of a counter-bureaucracy that can be located in the

wider network of asylum organisations in the UK and how a micro-politics can listen against the grain of the state.

*Chapter 5: Ambient listening*, focuses on the sonic environment of each organisation and this chapter marks a shift away from face-to-face encounters towards a mode of attunement that considers the textures, materials and atmospheres that have appeared in both the Empathetic and Bureaucratic listening chapters. The Ambient listening chapter gets to grips with the more ephemeral nature of sounds: tuning-in to the 'affective economy' of listening within the noisy social spaces of the Advice Service and the Drop-in. The theory and practice of Ambient listening engages with developments within geographic research around affective atmospheres (Anderson & Ash 2014), whilst contributing an important sonic dimension. The chapter engages research participants reflections of the sonic environment of each organisation alongside my own auto-ethnographic responses in order to get to grips with sonic environments composed of a polyphony of languages and voices, architectures, organisational rhythms, buzzing phone lines and malfunctioning photocopiers.

It will explore the micro-politics of ambience, as sonic environments elicit a multitude of affects: the same coagulation of sounds could be experienced as a sense of belonging, whilst simultaneously, these same sounds could work towards excluding certain others. The chapter will explore the affective barriers that snap into place in certain micro-spaces and what this reveals about who has the right to contribute to the ambience of each organisation. In short, this chapter deals with the ambience of audible citizenship.

The conclusion of this thesis will return to the main concept of Deep listening to outline four contributions that this project makes to geographical research as well as other disciplines such as citizenship studies and sensuous approaches to sociology. These four contributions are: *the affective economy of Deep listening*, *the listening state, audible citizenship and learning and learning to listen*. Through these contributions, the conclusion will outline the innovative nature of Deep Listening and how the findings of this thesis can feedback into front-line refugee and asylum-seeker services. Although this thesis focuses on the present of refugee and asylum-seeker organisations it's

important to stress that such spaces present a glimpse of a future beyond the debilitating relations of a listening state that only ever excludes refugees and asylum-seekers from the body of the nation-state. The next section is short, and offers a description of one of the influences on the listening developed in this thesis.

Intermission.



Figure 2. Pieter de Hooch's *The Courtyard of a House in Delft* (1658).

I have visited the National Portrait Gallery in London a number of times to see this painting by de Hooch (1658). One of the most memorable times was in 2016 when I was in the early stages of my thesis; I was thinking about the role of listening within everyday encounters and this painting resonated with me because of how sound is suggested in its composition. The painting influenced my own understanding of the

multi-dimensional nature of listening within ordinary spaces where intimate encounters mix with more public events.

For the viewer of *Delft*, there is no dominant subject; meaning that the viewer can wander the canvas. It is a painting of intimate detail, texture and tone; you can linger over the details of the brick work, the messy garden and the idle bucket and sweeping brush that suggest an event past or to come. A woman walks out into the light of the courtyard cradling what looks like a bowl; she holds a child's hand and they share a glance. Another woman can be seen in the shadows under the arch way with her back to the viewer. She has possibly turned away from the mundane scene of the courtyard; looking (and listening), facing an event in the street that is beyond our sightline as viewers, but it is a melee that I can imagine in my minds ear.

In its own way, *Delft* resonates with the intimate and everyday geographies that this thesis will explore and that I participated in during the 10-month period of my 'fieldwork'. de Hooch (1658) evokes an atmosphere I am familiar with where events brush against events and private moments and encounters are woven into the wider sonic environment. The painting is suffused with a domestic ambience that merges with that of the wider sound world beyond the courtyard; a mingling of different ambiences that is suggested by the windows and doors. All of which are open as people pass through; others overhear and observe from doorways where more intimate encounters overlap with public spaces. It is this sonic overlapping of the personal and intimate within public spaces and the different rhythms and temporalities of the ordinary that the concept of Deep listening also  grapples with, and it is this that will be the subject of the first chapter.

Chapter 1

Deep Listening

Introduction

This chapter will introduce Deep listening as a container for the conceptual and methodological underpinnings of my thesis that will be explored over the next two chapters. In particular, this chapter will focus on listening as an ethico-political act within the scale of the everyday and to develop this notion, I will draw together key theories and scholars from a wide range of disciplines.

The key works that enliven this thesis include those drawn from political theory (Bickford 1996); sociology (Back 2007; Bassel 2016); political and cultural geography (Darling 2010; Gallagher et al 2017) and Western experimental music and sound studies (Oliveros 2005; LaBelle 2010; 2017).

Guiding the development of my engagement with these works are two of the questions that structure this thesis. The questions that will be addressed in this chapter are: what does it mean to listen deeply as an ethico-political mode of attention? And, how can a theory and practice of listening disrupt the norms of audibility that, in part, structure the wider hostile environment towards asylum-seekers and refugees in the UK?

Through engaging with such an inter-disciplinary cast of key works this chapter aims to understand listening as a sensuous, intersubjective ethico-political act that is attuned to the affective capacities of the sonic environment. In particular, I want to develop a conceptual framework for a micro-politics of listening that focuses on the inter-woven nature of intimate encounters and wider structures of power to highlight how more audible and visible relations impinge upon and are resisted within the everyday spaces of asylum-seeker and refugee services.

As the thesis unfolds, the conceptual will mingle with the methodological and then with the empirical. What will become apparent in the diverse listening practices that will be discussed across the breadth of this thesis (including the position of the listening researcher and those of the differently emplaced research participants), is a form of attention that is both visceral and multi-sensual (how can we listen through the body? How do we listen to the presence of a voice in a letter or email?). Moreover, I am

interested in a form of listening attention that grapples with what is said and heard, but is also concerned with more ephemeral phenomena; such as the way emotions ripple across an encounter and how the materiality of sound can transform communicative interactions.   From this perspective, listening is always about more-than just talk and listening deeply to the social world involves tuning into the sonic textures and shifting atmospheres in which communication unfolds.

The first section of this chapter will introduce Deep listening as an overall framework for this thesis. In particular, it will engage with the sociologist Les Back (2007; 2016) and the composer Pauline Oliveros' (2005) understanding of Deep listening to develop the term as a scaffold for the theoretical and methodological approaches adopted. Each of the sections of this chapter outline key terms that are important for understanding Deep listening. The second section will introduce Deep listening as a micro-political act and the third and final section will introduce the concept of audible citizenship. One of the contentions of this thesis is that Deep listening is essential to understanding everyday acts of citizenship and this section will discuss how audible citizenship contributes to contemporary debates within citizenship studies around Engin Isin's (2008) seminal work on 'acts of citizenship'. This engagement will advance understanding of listening as an act of citizenship.

Deep Listening

1.

Prior to outlining the Deep listening developed by this thesis it is important that I outline the wider influence that Back's (2007) sociological approach to listening has had within political and cultural geographies. According to Back (2007), listening as a research practice involves devising modes of critical openness and forms of attention that are concerned with the quieter narratives of belonging. Where the possibility of hope is 'established in the accumulation of small acts that defy division, hatred and mutual misunderstanding, where the counter-intuitive (that is, that people refuse to be defined by the differences that are socially ascribed to them) is intuitive' (Back, 2007: 167).

Back's (2007) work has been influential with geographic research that focuses on the everyday scales of power and belonging within refugee and asylum seeker services (Askins 2015; Darling 2011). It also strikes a common cause with geographic research interested in the sonic environment (Gallagher et al 2017) and the affective structures of everyday life (Bennett et al 2015; Wilson 2016). This chapter will engage with the different facets of Back's (2007) work, to outline how my conception of Deep listening can contribute to refugee and asylum-seeker geographies and the wider field of cultural geography.

In elucidating Deep listening as a container term, this section will concentrate on the work of Back (2007) and the American composer-theorist, Pauline Oliveros (2005). Although Back (2007) and Oliveros (2005) are not in direct dialogue with each other, in their respective fields they have each outlined a conceptual and practical approach to Deep listening and it is my contention that it will be conceptually invigorating to draw their approaches together. Doing so, expands the sensuous, multi-dimensional quality of Deep listening. A quality of listening that mixes the intimate and public dimensions that were introduced in my reading of the de Hooch (1658) painting in the introduction.

According to Michael Bull and Les Back (2016), Deep listening is essentially a type of auditory attention which involves 'attuning our ears to listen again to the multiple layers of meaning potentially embedded in the same sound' (2003: 4). From Back's (2003; 2007) sociological perspective, Deep listening involves listening again to develop practices of dialogue, investigation and interpretation that can disrupt the status quo in order to reckon with the voices that are marginalised and barely audible within society. More importantly, Back understands Deep listening as a form of active listening, which he describes as an interactive process that 'challenges the listener's preconceptions and position while at the same time it engages critically with the content of what is being said and heard' (2003: 23). According to Back (2007), active listening is a communicative process that involves coming to terms with the preconceptions you may have of your interlocutor so as to challenge the assumptions and prejudices that are attached to a particular persons voice and presence.

Deep listening is an active form of attention that engages critically with what is said and heard between people, but it also stretches the ear to attune to the wider sonic environment. Opening the ear up to the multidimensional aspects of listening is the key concern of Back's ongoing project with John Drever - beginning in 2005 - to record the sounds of London from the top of a building at Goldsmiths College. As Back writes; 'with the help of John's sophisticated sound recording technology we have attempted […] the creation of a kind of aural panorama fashioning from the once-condemned tower a kind of London ear' (2007: 117). Exploring the multiple sound layers of the environment encourages a form of attention that is attuned to the overlapping dynamics between more intimate and public sounds and spaces. Moreover, it is an approach that involves learning to listen to these dynamics because listening deeply, or actively and critically are not automatic faculties; they are a skill that we have to learn. It is this form of experimentation, of listening critically to the sound world that draws Back (2007) and Oliveros' (2005) approaches together. We have to remember that we listen through doing.

2.

A critical encounter between Back (2007) and Oliveros (2005) is necessary because their work highlights the importance of attunement to the wider sound world as a critical process. As with Back and Drever's (2007) panoramic soundscape of London, Oliveros is interested in listening to the shifting, overlapping dimensions of the wider sound world…

> 'simultaneously we may be taking in other dimensions - a dog barking outside, other conversations in the same room, passing traffic and so forth. Our global attention is engaging with numerous overlapping dimensions created by sounds' (Oliveros 2005: 26).

When writing about Oliveros' approach I am specifically referring to her 'Deep Listening Pieces' that she calls 'attention strategies […] for ways of listening and responding in

consideration of oneself, others and the environment' (2005: 29)[9]. Deep listening is a dynamic form of attention that requires the listener to attend to the local-global dimensions of a sound world composed of human-material resonances. One of the preoccupations of this thesis is to explore how the sonic atmosphere shapes communicative interaction and this is why it is imperative to draw together Back (2007) and Oliveros' (2005) notions of Deep listening into a productive encounter. Drawing together the two is important as the composer and musician, Oliveros' (2005) provides more of a practical understanding for doing Deep listening whereas Back (2007) outlines a socio-political imperative.

This discussion on Deep listening also resonates with recent research in the field of sonic geographies that  have called for practices of 'extended listening' to explore sound's capacity to connect 'disparate bodies' across a range of 'spaces and corporealities'. What is of interest here 'is how feedback loops between sound; space; infrastructures; matter; and bodies generate listening responses' (Gallagher el al 2017: 625). As this chapter makes clear, our listening responses to such 'feedback loops' are charged with received structures of meaning and therefore attuning to the local/global, intimate/geopolitical dynamic has a crucial ethical and political dynamic. Sonic geographic approaches have shaped this thesis and the concept of sound and listening it develops and it will be addressed in more detail in *Chapter 5: Ambient Listening*. Some of the approaches to sonic geographies that have influenced the development of Deep listening include:  Boland 2010; Gallagher & Prior (2014); Kanngieser (2012); Robbins (2019); Revill (2016).

The particular ethics and politics of Deep listening are highlighted by Back (2007), when he writes that 'sounds are, after all, the sensing of vibrations: our ears pick up the vibrations of movement'. Using the 'London ear' recording project as an example, Back goes onto state that…

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[9] Pauline Oliveros was also a composer and her music incorporated her approach to Deep listening. Oliveros' music can be characterised as 'minimalist' and her instrumentation usually revolved around her voice and accordion. The music usually combines composition and elements of improvisation.

'listening to cosmopolitan London is different from looking at it, in part because race and racism operate within ocular grammars of difference. Listening admits presences in such encounters that can be missed in the visual play of the skin' (2007: 119).

Such presences involve the affective structures of feeling that charge listening responses and this is further developed in a collaborative article that focuses on listening to the sounds of London and Berlin (Agata, Back & Jackson 2019). This research explores the rise of nationalism and inequalities across two European cities by developing attentiveness to what sounds can reveal about claims to entitlement and belonging. At this stage, it is important to state that the intimate/global dynamic of Deep listening involves getting to grips with how received social and political structures impinge upon, and are interpreted and resisted within ordinary encounters. The dynamic described so far resonates with Rachel Pain and Lynn Staeheli's understanding of 'intimate geopolitics', where intimate relations 'frequently traverse the inter-personal, institutional and national realms' (2014: 345). In the context of this thesis, listening should be understood as an activity that can be structured by certain debilitating power dynamics, and people can, however unwittingly, start to listen like the state. Tackling this complex dynamic requires a listening otherwise attuned to acts of face-to-face interaction, the echos of voices, sonic textures, architecture and the particular atmospheres that compose everyday spaces.

2.
Deep listening is a call to listen otherwise to the social world, and this involves an ongoing, careful attuning to our own and others listening responses. What preconceptions do we harbour when we listen to others? And how do certain received structures in our listening patterns reflect how the state listens? To listen deeply then, involves a struggle to come to terms with the power dynamics of everyday communication as well as understanding how listening can resist such debilitating relations.

The phrase listen otherwise is a philosophical term used by Jean-Luc Nancy (2007: 4) in order to make a distinction between hearing and listening. For Nancy, listening involves the 'stretching of the ear', a sensory intensification that provokes a concern, a curiosity or an anxiety. If listening involves an intense reckoning with the shifting sense of what is heard, then hearing 'has a special relationship with sense' [and the] 'intellectual or intelligible acceptance of the word' and the 'perceived meaning' of what might be said (Nancy 2007: 4-5). Therefore, listening/hearing and sound/sense are involved in a complex interplay where 'every sensory register thus bears with it both its simple nature and its tense, attentive, or anxious state: seeing and looking, smelling and sniffing or scenting, tasting and savouring, touching and feeling or palpating, hearing and listening (Nancy 2007: 4-5). Drawing on Nancy's philosophy of the ear, it is possible to understand deep listening as a way of sensing otherwise where sound and sense mingle and 'resonate in each other or through each other' (Nancy 2007: 7).

In other words, every voice makes sense through verbal and non-verbal registers of communication, but such interactions are modulated by how buildings make voices echo and how those voices are charged with ripples of emotion and unpredictable affects. The following section addresses the micro-politics of Deep listening that will further explore the ethics and politics of Back's (2007) notion of sociological Deep listening.

## Micro-politics of Listening

The aim of this section is to engage with the literature around the politics of listening; in particular the everyday scales of such a politics. In terms of Deep listening, an understanding of micro-politics is important in developing the political nature of Deep listening as an 'accumulation of small acts that defy division, hatred and mutual misunderstanding, where the counter-intuitive (that is, that people refuse to be defined by the differences that are socially ascribed to them) is intuitive' (Back 2007: 167).

To understand the micro-politics of listening this section will engage with the sociologist, Leah Bassel's (2017) definition. According to Bassel, a micro-politics of

listening involves: 'specific places, groups and practices and what happens in the attempt to create a shared responsibility towards changing the roles of speakers to listeners and to demand to be heard on different terms' (2017: 8). To open up a discussion of a micro-politics of listening, this chapter will engage with the work of the political theorist, Susan Bickford (1996), who has inspired Bassel (2017) and my own understanding of the political possibilities of listening. Bassel's (2017) definition of a micro-politics of listening will be developed later in this section via a productive tension with Back's (2007) notion of listening.

Employing the micro suffix to describe the political has a critical relation to the philosophical work of Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari who state that 'every politics is simultaneously a *macro*politics and a *micro*politics' (emphases in original, 1988: 213). Debates around these two terms have long been of interest in cultural geography (see Jellis & Gerlach 2017; Katz 1996; Merriman 2018). More specifically, the layers of interlocking relations between the different scales of politics is reminiscent of the 'intimate geopolitics' described by Pain and Staeheli (2014) as it traverses ordinary/intimate interactions and national/international realms. Although it is important to acknowledge the wider antecedents in the geographical debates around these terms, a detailed exploration of this literature would lead to a detour with regards to the aims of this thesis. Therefore, this section will focus on Deep listening as a micro-political act.

3.

Alongside other prominent scholars including Andrew Dobson (2012) and the aforementioned Les Back (2007), Susan Bickford's (1996) work on listening, conflict and citizenship has been important in addressing listening as an understudied socio-political act. Central to Bickford's (1996) theory is that listening is an essential act of citizenship; moreover, her political conception relies on the intersubjective nature of listening. For Bickford (1996), this means that listening attention is integral to forms of dialogic communication because it requires collective articulation; emphasising that any conflict that may arise from such communication should be taken seriously (see

Bickford 1996: 4)[10]. According to Bickford (1996), listening involves judging for oneself and thinking inside moments alongside others to work out what to do when action is necessary in the here and now, thus…

> 'political action always engages the tension between subjectivity and intersubjectivity; somehow, recognising the agency of others has to coexist with our own striving. Figuring out what is behind that "somehow" requires an exploration of how we discern a difference between distorted listening and simply active listening - that is, between treating each other as objects and taking each other seriously'.
> (Bickford 1996: 139).

In this extract, Bickford (1996) poses an idealised practice of active listening that resonates with the language used by Back (2007) to describe Deep listening. For both scholars, *active listening* involves working to avoid treating (political) interlocutors as a predefined object; rather, it involves understanding the relational complexity of our own and other people's lives. Gaining such understanding can be a long and uncomfortable process because it may require change from us, and to make way for others. In the dichotomy posed by Bickford (1996), *distorted listening* would be the failure to hear such calls for greater equality and complexity, thus upholding the norms of audibility and communicative barriers that adhere to the marginalising power dynamics of an 'us' versus 'them' politics. A dichotomy that is constituted by the asylum regime and the hostile environment towards refugee and asylum-seekers.

However, despite my sympathies with the call to listen actively to the social world, I find the distinction between a distorted and a purer form of active listening to be a conceptual misnomer. Such a tidy dichotomy does not represent the listening that this thesis aims to get to grips with; listening is so much more messy than Bickford's (1996) description leads us to believe as there is no ideal pre-distorted position from which we can listen. All listening has the potential to be distorted in some way, whether this is by

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[10] Through a concern with listening rather than speaking, Bickford's (1996) work resonates with longstanding concerns in human geography about speech acts, communication and the work of Jürgen Habermas (1987) (see Gregory 1994).

the physical properties of the room in which it takes place, or by the intersecting differences that charge the encounter.

Even well intentioned forms of active listening can result in a distortion or mis-recognition. The messy power dynamics of listening will be approached in more detail in the first empirical chapter on Empathetic listening. For example: some asylum service workers and volunteers interviewed for this project stated that their ability to listen with empathy was a skill needed to build relationships with client's. For these participants, the ability to empathise meant that they could negotiate differences and come to an understanding of the position of the person they were working with. Theoretically speaking, the role of empathy that will go onto be discussed in the Empathetic listening chapter, resonates with feminist scholars such as Elspeth Probyn (1993). In this line of argument, empathy can be understood as a radical form of reflexivity that works towards the transformation of received hierarchies of, for example: race and class.

However, empathetic feelings are far messier when we consider the ethical and political realities of feeling with and for others. As Clare Hemmings argues: feeling empathetic 'may lead to sentimental attachment to the other, rather than a genuine engagement with her concerns, then […] it may signal a cannibalisation of the other masquerading as care' (2012: 152). This is a particularly acute point that strikes a chord with post-colonial feminist perspectives that critically evaluate the slippage between empathy/care and pity in white Western consideration of 'global others' (see Trinh 1989; Doezema 2001). In terms of a micro-politics of Deep listening, it is important to be attuned to the intersectional differences that structure everyday encounters and the affective and communicative barriers that may snap into place. Although Deep listening can be described as active listening, I do not think the term adequate for understanding the ongoing struggle of listening as an intersubjective activity.

A more substantial way of conceptualising Deep listening as a micro-political practice that challenges the active/distorted dichotomy is to understand listening as a form of active yielding. Michael Taussig (1993) uses this term to articulate a communicative tussle that is always partly out of the individual subject's control. Active yielding

articulates a tension that runs between passivity and control, which better addresses the reciprocity of communication that Bickford (1996) adheres to in her politics of listening. If listening (as an intersubjective act) is dialogic then you are in turn listened to and you allow yourself to be imposed upon as you impose yourself. The micro-politics of Deep listening is an ongoing process of learning and unlearning ways of listening where we come to terms with the limits of our own capacities to listen across difference. To develop this account further, I want to address the importance of relationality and vulnerability to a micro-politics of listening by engaging with Judith Butler's (2004) work on the limits of grief and the radical possibilities of vulnerability.

4.

Judith Butler's (1990; 1993) work on identity and gender performativity are important in Bickford's conception of a politics of listening (see Bickford 1996: 111-120). However, this section concentrates on how some of Butler's more recent work on articulating an ethico-political subject connects to my own theorisation of Deep listening. Engaging with Butler's (2004) work will highlight how we can listen with certain preconditions that inhibit our ability to hear beyond the established norms of audibility.

In formulating a response to the diminished public discourses in the US after the 2001 Al-Qaeda attacks in New York and the resulting 'War on Terror', Butler (2004) wrote about how a 'hierarchy of grief' structured national responses to these entwined events. What Butler meant by this was that in the national discourse, some lives were not considered worth grieving and that such distinctions played a part in who became recognised as a subject and who was excluded (2004:19). As an example, Butler compares how mourning the journalist Daniel Pearl (who was murdered in 2002 by a terrorist group in Pakistan) presents no problem due to his familiar origin, family and education' (2004: 38). This legitimised grief is in sharp contrast to the nameless victims of the US military's 'war on terror' or the unknown Palestinians killed by a US backed Israeli military. According to Butler, in this hierarchy of grief: 'Arab peoples tend to fall outside our conception of the human which has been [set] in a Western mould' (Butler 2004: 32).

Another contemporary example of the limits of grief for othered others would be the case of Shamima Begum. In 2015, Begum and two other friends travelled from Bethnal Green in London to Syria with the intention of joining Islamic State. By 2019, Begum had sought refuge in the Al-Hawl refugee camp in Northern Syria (Lloyd 2019). At this time she was pregnant, had already experienced the trauma of two of her children dying, and continued to live through a present reality of violent conflict in a situation where her unborn child would not receive adequate healthcare.

When Begum stated that she wanted to return to the UK, the Home Secretary Sajid Javid cancelled her British citizenship, speculating that she could receive Bangladeshi citizenship, which is the country her family emigrated from to the UK and a country she had never visited. In response, Begum's lawyer, Mohammed Akinjee stated that 'Shamima was born, raised, groomed and radicalised here in the UK. The suggestion that Shamima is to you genuinely a Bangladeshi citizen is unsustainable' (Greenfield 2019). In rendering Begum as stateless, the actions of the British state adhered to a particular 'hierarchy of grief' in which a young British woman who wore a veil and who had transgressed the Western mould of citizenship, was fundamentally excluded. As Begum soaked up the heat from the spotlight of the British media and the ire of the Home Secretary, she became, to borrow a phrase from Imogen Tyler: the 'abject other of citizenship' (2013: 69).

The actions of the British state described here also relate to Peter Nyers' (2006) work on the phenomena of 'accidental citizenship'. Nyers' (2006) work focuses on the debate around 'accidental citizenship' that emerged in the US since the 2001 Al-Qaeda attacks in New York. The term 'accidental citizenship' was used at this time in relation to the 'birthright' citizenship of individuals born in the US to parents who were 'non-citizens'. Nyers states that 'those who attach the adjective 'accidental' to the noun 'citizen' invariably do so in order to question the purity of certain citizens, and often with the intent of undermining the ability of some native-born citizens to claim the rights and entitlements of birthright citizenship' (2006: 24-25). By revoking Begum's citizenship the British state fundamentally questions the rights of those who might have parents born outside the UK, setting a dangerous precedent that shuts down any public

discussion of the other questions regarding the societal failures that may have led to Begum's actions. Questions posed by Begum's lawyer regarding the possible online grooming of a vulnerable young teenager and her subsequent radicalisation were not discussed in any significant way in the media, nor in the state's decision-making that made Begum a non-citizen languishing in a refugee camp in Syria.

Working through these contemporary examples of the abject others of state defined citizenship raises a further question: how does this relate to politics of Deep listening? Although the cases above do not mention a direct, active form of intersubjective listening discussed by Bickford (1996) or the sociological listening of Back (2007), it is possible to understand how such media representations circulate in the wider economy of public opinion and feeling. In the case of Begum, the hardline stance taken by the UK Government reveals the ways in which the British state listens to citizens such as Begum. In the terms set out by Bickford (1996), it is possible to deduce that the state has not taken Begum seriously as a complicated individual who has transgressed the position of the 'good' citizen. Why Begum may have left her family in Bethnal Green to join Islamic State is not of concern to them, nor is it the concern of certain sections of the media who presented her as an 'Isis bride' and a 'terrorist'. Either way, she is objectified as a figure who is outside and far beyond the position and values of state approved British citizenship. In this case (as with many others) the state listens with certain preconditions that inhibit the ability to hear and respond to the troubling and complicated narrative of Begum that, if listened to seriously, challenge the preconceptions of belonging and the alienation and vulnerabilities that some British citizens experience.

Alternatively, a *deep* form of social listening would contend with Begum's narrative as a part of British citizenship. Not as a radical outlier, but a situation in which some harsh truths could be confronted in a more challenging and uncomfortable encounter. In terms of a micro-politics of listening, the case discussed here is on a national scale, whereas the focus of this project is to explore the everyday listening practice and encounters of refugee and asylum-services. The national scale, alongside media representations are relevant to the more local scale, and the task ahead is to

understand how such wider discourses charge or are challenged by everyday acts of listening. I now want to shift the focus back to the intersubjective nature of listening and Butler's (2003; 2004) conception of common vulnerability.

Although Butler's (2004) call for a different understanding of the ethico-political subject does not mention listening directly, her concept resonates with a way of confronting such injustices that is reminiscent of listening as an intersubjective process. In Butler's terms, to formulate a conception of community that is formed out of a common vulnerability, requires an ethical, relational subjectivity that is capable of exposing 'our vulnerability and singularity, and that our political situation consists in part in learning how best to handle - and honour - this constant and necessary exposure' (Butler 2004: 31-32). Striving to handle and honour a common vulnerability is recognised in the form of attention Deep listening anticipates; what emerges from this is a concept and practice that is attuned to the intersubjective tensions and received structures that charge encounters.

Furthermore, Butler's (2003; 2004) thought is integral to a conceptualisation of forms of listening beyond the dichotomy of active/passive attention. As grappling with the ethical (and political) necessity of becoming 'undone' in relation to others resonates with the notion of listening as a form of active-yielding…

> 'Perhaps most importantly, we must recognize that ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willing-ness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human. To be undone by another is a primary necessity, an anguish, to be sure, but also a chance—to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me, but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient ''I'' as a kind of possession.'
> (2003: 136)

For the concept of Deep listening, a willingness to be undone in moments of unknowingness is central to the states of reception necessary for understanding listening as an ethico-political act. Using this extract to build upon a politics of listening may prick some ears as Butler (2003) specifically refers to ethics, thus raising the question of the political validity of my own claims. It is important to remember that ethical comportment and political action are entwined and come into play when we listen. Self-reflection is needed when listening to others if we are to understand how we are affected by received structures and pre-conditions; such reflections can lead to actions about how 'we' deal with the uneven dynamics of power that charge our intimate encounters. Therefore, a micro-politics of Deep listening involves interpreting how we listen as individuals alongside the conditions in which we listen with and alongside others in order to come to terms with the emergent counterpublic spaces and the politics of hope and possibility contained within the everyday sites of refugee and asylum-seeker services.


5.

The next stage of this chapter will return to Bassel's (2017) conception of a micro-politics of listening. Doing so, will engage a productive tension that exists between Back's (2007) conception of Deep listening and what Bassel (2017) understands as political. Negotiating the tensions that seemingly exist between both approaches has made critical space for my own conception of Deep listening as an ethico-political act.

To begin this discussion I will return to another important facet of Back's (2007; 2003) definition of the sociological attention he wants to attain through Deep listening. A telling statement raises objections from the likes of Bassel (2017), where Back stresses the importance of 'the everyday kinds of negotiations that are made in banal and often undramatic forms of coexistence', and that such moments of 'critical opening cannot be reduced to a political manifesto, or some kind of didactic call to arms [..] they are by their very nature unstable, fleeting and paradoxical (2003: 284). Both Bassel (2017) and Back (2003) seem to agree on the importance of the everyday sites and scales of ordinary interactions, but Bassel (2017) states that a micro-politics of listening is distinct from what Back calls 'the slow pace of sociological judgement' (2007: 19). In response,

Bassel writes that whilst this slower pace 'may make the case for sociology compelling, it does not always translate into effective and immediate political action' (2017: 15). In considering the critical tension here, it is hard to uphold the position that Back's (2007) approach to a slower paced, Deep listening is any less political than one that translates into immediate political action.

What I find so compelling about Back's (2007) writing is the careful and considerate position of the listening researcher. In developing my own ethnographic practice, I have found Back's (2007) writing on the subject to be a source of inspiration; as a slow pace is necessary when the researcher participates in the everyday lives of an organisation. In my own work, a slow and careful pace was necessary to gain the trust of the organisation and to attune to the complex social world in which I was a participant. Without such a careful approach, it would have been difficult to explore the micro-politics at stake in the intimate encounters of the refugee and asylum-seeker services where my research was based.

It is also important to note that Back's (2007) slow process does coalesce into events or actions that are more expressly political. For example: Back (2007) was involved with an organisation called South London Citizens (SLC). This was an organisation set up by activists and members of the local community who wanted to work collectively to challenge the workings of the Home Office immigration service that is based at Lunar House (Croydon, UK). The SLC set up public meetings that took evidence from both asylum-seekers and immigration officers in an attempt to get the Home Office to take notice of their concerns. The composition of a group such as the SLC (that consisted of church members; activists and academics, some of who who were citizens and non-citizens) is itself a form of collective community action that challenges the limited conceptions of state-bound citizenship and forms of belonging that exclude 'abject subjects' such as asylum-seekers.

Reflecting on the work of the SLC, Back wrote that the group 'is the realisation of what Edward Said would call 'the practice of identities other than those given by the flag or the national war of the moment'' (2007: 45, citing Said 2004: 80). The example of Back

(2007) working with the SLC demonstrates how sociological/ethnographic engagement is entwined with more direct political actions such as community organising. The ethnographic process (and eventual research output) is not expressly political in the way that Bassel (2017) frames it, but the slow process of building relationships is part of a complex 'connective tissue', essential for building trust and linking the different layers of activity that research can contribute to when undertaken with care and respect to the communities and participants involved (McCann 2011: 109).

The critical tension highlighted between Back (2007) and Bassel (2017), leads to another point that needs to be explored between the political possibilities of everyday acts and the political as social rupture. This discussion is framed by the wider post-political turn within geography (Swyngedouw 2009). The post-political is a term widely debated within political geography, which has been used as a conceptual tool to discuss changing governmental structures and how political action (from below and outside these frameworks) makes itself heard and visible within the public sphere. The post-political condition is used to describe the transformation of government from the clashing of different interest groups and ideologically opposed actors into a form of government that is understood as a manager of technical processes and policies (Rancière 2010; Swyngedouw 2009). In doing so, post-political governance closes down available public spaces for political debate and struggle.

Political geographers have engaged with the political theory of Jacques Rancière (2010) to develop an understanding of this post-political governmental turn. For Rancière, a 'politics exists when the figure of a specific subject is constituted, a supernumerary subject in relation to the calculated number of groups, places, and functions in a society' (2006: 51). In Rancière's theory, 'political subjects forever remain precarious figures that hesitate at the borders of silence'. Borders that are maintained by normative societal powers that define 'the visible and the invisible, the audible, and the inaudible, the sayable , and the unsayable' within the public sphere (Rockhill 2006: 89-90). In other words, Rancière's theory privileges political acts that involve rupturing of the norms of visibility and audibility in an attempt to re-configure the dominant order, or what Rancière calls the 'Distribution of the Sensible' (2006).

In geographical debates, Rancière's (2010) theory has been used to explore how post-political governance forecloses fundamental questions regarding human rights, social justice and  what can be called 'proper politics' (see Dikeç  2013). If we are to follow the post-political condition, the political terrain that is left to be contested is…

> 'reduced to moments of violent rupture through public demonstrations. Ruptures are increasingly apparent and questions remain as to how they form, whether they are the only space left for proper politics to be enacted, as well as whether the properly political can be enacted and constructed in smaller, less globally visible spaces leading to political change'
> (Temenos 2017: 584).

A micro-politics of Deep listening that focuses on the everyday sites and scales of refugee and asylum-seeker services is part of this debate, contributing to an existing field of research that explores a quieter everyday politics (see Askins 2015; Darling 2011; 2013). The everyday acts that my own research focuses on may not be interpreted as moments of political rupture but the relationship between violent rupture and quieter political encounters should be understood as inter-related phenomena. More visible acts of defiance such as a protest or demonstration do not appear out of thin air: different community groups have to come together, relationships need to be built in person and online, doors need to be knocked on, memes and videos are made and shared and banners need to be painted. Ordinary moments of  care for each other are part of this connective tissue that relates the more intimate and local to the wider public sphere.

To understand how a micro-politics of listening is enacted in less globally visible spaces, my own approach is influenced by Staeheli's et al (2012) development of the term 'ordinary citizenship'.  Staeheli et al state that whilst 'ordinary citizenship' is…

> 'not the stuff of big politics' […] it is the 'small actions, challenges, and the experiments to which they give rise [that] can lead to varied forms of contact

and engagement that hold the potential to nudge established patterns of control
and authority and to anticipate new political acts'
(2012: 630).

Such an understanding resonates with Back's (2003; 2007) focus on undramatic forms of coexistence so far discussed. Moreover, by mobilising the term citizenship, Staeheli et al (2012) are insisting on a re-articulation of a contested form of national belonging to include local actions that would usually be considered beyond the bounds of state sponsored citizenship. A micro-politics of Deep listening focused on the everyday encounters within refugee and asylum-seeker services aims to understand how received state structures imbue such encounters and more importantly, how they can challenge them. The subsequent empirical chapters will elucidate how everyday acts of listening involve struggles to be be heard and accounted for and are integral to the contradictions and bindings that compose community spaces.

6.

A micro-politics of Deep listening involves focusing on listening as an intersubjective communicative act (Bickford 1996). What this leads to - especially in the political theory of Bickford (1996) - is the privileging of human interaction in a way that leaves the affective dimensions of sound under-explored. In contrast, the conception of listening that this project seeks to elucidate involves thinking about listening as a 'sensible activity […] grounded in affective and visceral registers of human existence' (Hirshkind 2006: 31). A more sensuous politics of Deep listening is attuned to how communicative interactions are enveloped in messy, sonically diverse social spaces that can modulate how we listen and enunciate across difference.

My approach here is influenced by Sara Ahmed's work on the cultural politics of emotion, particularly her notion of the 'affective economy' (Ahmed 2004). This phrase is deployed by Ahmed to describe how emotions circulate within intimate and public spaces to 'align individuals with communities - or bodily space with social space - through the very intensity of their attachments' (2004: 119). Sound is a visceral phenomena and whether the listener is aware of it (or not) they are exposed to the

multi-dimensional sounds of their surrounding environment. Therefore, attuning to the wider environment requires a form of attention that is open to the subtle 'rippling effect of emotions' that modulate everyday encounters; such subtle (and not-so subtle) charges may lead to a cathexis, drawing certain people together, but they can also work towards maintaining 'boundaries of otherness' (Ahmed 2014). What Ahmed (2004; 2014) makes clear in her work is a particular politics to attunement: it is possible to tune-in and tune-out; filtering what we hear in a way that can silence certain others, keeping them at a distance.

Although Ahmed's (2004) work on the 'affective economy' does not address listening directly, it is an important concept for understanding how our senses can become fine-tuned. An understanding of the 'affective economy' of emotion gives us the conceptual tools to understand how state structured, norms of audibility circulate within the public sphere. As Ahmed states…

> 'emotions do not positively inhabit anybody or anything, meaning that 'the subject' is simply one nodal point in the economy, rather than its origin and destination. This is extremely important: it suggests that the sideways and backwards movement of emotions such as hate is not contained within the contours of the subject'.
> (2004: 46).

How we listen and respond within visceral encounters is caught up in a wider 'affective economy' in which certain assumptions and inequalities circulate in the social world and manifest themselves in our interactions with others. What we may learn about our listening responses may be uncomfortable as they can actually uphold certain norms of audibility. The link between affective economies of emotion and listening is made explicit as it is interpreted into Back's (2007) notion of Deep listening as an important part of reflecting on how we as listeners attune to the inequalities that may surface in our interactions. Back's work on Deep listening draws on Ahmed's (2004) ideas in his writing about how our senses become educated by the prevailing norms of audibility that work to produce a 'sensuous structure of affects' (Back 2011: 316).

The notion of affective attunement fits into the concept of Deep listening because it encourages a reflective mode of attention that is alert to the sensuous structures of our listening responses. The ways in which we listen may be imbued with the asymmetrical relations of class; culture; race and gender that can profoundly affect how we listen to others. Therefore, attuning to the charged intensities of an environment is an important grounding for a micro-politics of Deep listening that aims to challenge the received norms of audibility. Attuning to the 'affective economies' of listening is part of an ongoing process of learning and unlearning ways of listening across difference that can re-educate our senses for the better.

My own empirical research focuses on the 'affective economy' of sounds and the unpredictability of our responses to the sonic environment. The micro-politics of Deep listening developed across this thesis is interested in the complex relational responses to sonic phenomena. Certain sounds may be comforting to some, they can be simultaneously disruptive to others, provoking a sense of unease  where affective barriers can snap into place. Engagement with Ahmed's (2004) model of the 'affective economy' will be taken up in Chapter's 3 and 5, and will then the affective economies of listening will be presented in the conclusion as one of the main overall contributions of this thesis. The final part of this chapter articulates listening as an act of citizenship via the introduction of the term audible citizenship in order to explore how Deep listening can contribute to contemporary debates around the concept of 'acts of citizenship' (Isin 2008) .

Audible Citizenship

The concept of Deep listening engages with a micro-politics that should be explored as an act of citizenship and this section will do so by discussing contemporary debates within political geography and citizenship studies. To begin, I want to return to the case of Shamina Begum. By revoking Begum's citizenship, the Home Office acted in a way that defines the strict exclusionary boundaries of the nation state; producing an unwanted, transgressive subject as stateless.

7.

According to Nyers (2006), forms of citizenship bound to the nation-state are produced through the constitutive exclusion of certain others. In Begum's case this exclusion involves the actions of a UK citizen who is expelled from the body of the nation, but this form of citizenship is also designed to exclude those journeying towards the nation, such as refugees and asylum-seekers. Essential to the conceptual understanding of a politics of listening is a critique of such normative models of citizenship; how these models suffuse everyday encounters and how people come to listen and speak like the state. What this thesis intends to develop is a politics of listening that contributes to acts that would escape such normative models that tend to exclude refugee and asylum-seeker others. How can a micro-politics of Deep listening challenge the norms of audibility in a way that is 'generative of new modes of being in the world'? (Nyers 2015: 29). The final part of this chapter focuses on listening as an act of 'ordinary citizenship' (Staeheli 2012 et al), and will conclude by introducing the concept of audible citizenship and what this term contributes to Deep listening and contemporary debates about defining citizenship otherwise.

Engin Isin's (2008) notion of the 'activist citizen' has been an important point of departure for contemporary debates about forms of citizenship that pose challenges to the exclusionary dynamics of the state. According to Isin's (2008) term, activist citizenship involves a rupture from the given forms of being and doing (2008: 25). Activist citizens challenge the normative models of citizenship as they re-configure what it means to act politically within the nation-state. An important example of such political action is the Sans Papiers movement, which involved a group of 300 migrants without permanent residence in France who, in June 1996, occupied the Saint-Bernard Church in Paris. The participants demanded legal residency and some of those involved went on hunger strike during the protest. In August 1996, the police used force to evict the migrants and the French Government reneged on their promises to improve the situation of the so-called undocumented workers (see Balibar 2000; Isin 2012).

In defining the activist citizen, Isin adopts a distinction between acting (which requires courage, resolve and nerve), and simply being (which is less confrontational, as it requires the subject to conform to pre-determined habits and behaviours) (Isin 2009). The protesters of the Sans Papiers movement certainly fit this distinction; as actors deemed 'illegal' by the French state, they are acting and organising with 'courage' because making their voices heard within public and clashing with the interests of the government could result in arrest and deportation. Despite the usefulness of this distinction that allows for a conception of political action from below; the activist citizenship identified by Isin (2008) appears to uphold a distinction between acting/being and seemingly upholds the language of political rupture. This distinction recalls the post-political condition where a proper politics that consists of acts of mass mobilisations (the clamour and noise of protest and demonstration) is valorised. Leaving very little consideration to the quieter political encounters and varied forms of engagement that are represented by conceptions of 'ordinary citizenship' (Staeheli et al 2012). Although it is important not to under-politicise the ordinary, it is essential to strike a balanced analysis that doesn't over-politicise as well; therefore, this thesis is careful to map the interconnections between the different layers of micro-politcal actions.

Recent articulations of the debate around alternative forms of citizenship make clear that a simplistic distinction between acting/being does not do justice to Isin's (2009) figure of the activist citizen. As Joe Turner (2016) elaborates; acts of citizenship can include events and struggles that amount to a prosaic rupturing of the ordinary. A rupture that may reveal the contingencies of what Isin refers to as the 'habitus, practice, conduct, discipline and routine' (Isin 2009: 379). There is a rich terrain of recent research that focuses on everyday sites of struggle and belonging and this extract highlights the particular nuance of Isin's (2009) concept of the 'activist citizen'. Everyday practices are contingent on wider socio-political conditions and by attuning to the micro-political it is possible to open up citizenship acts to consider how more national and geo-political concerns resonate in more local contexts. Moreover, these spaces are the sites of acts that confound the state exclusions that work to limit an asylum-seekers life within the UK.

Alternative forms of practicing and conceptualising citizenship are attuned to the frictions in routine practices and events, where; 'there is a recognition that political acts maybe prosaic and yet still alter a perceptual field in some way, rather than demanding that such acts only ever be revolutionary in nature and effect' (Darling 2014: 88). The prosaic-ruptures located in everyday spaces are present within Jonathan Darling's (2011) research into the contentious politics of care within an asylum-seeker drop-in service. Also, in a project that focused on a be-friending service for refugees and asylum-seekers, Kye Askins (2015) outlines similar concerns through what she calls a 'quiet politics of belonging'. A being-together that recognises that 'encounters between different groups can draw upon and reiterate socially constructed difference, but that they also have the potential to shift how we feel about our others' (2015: 473). Such ordinary forms of citizenship are essential for articulating the agency of asylum-seekers and the services that work alongside them. This is especially true if we understand that such prosaic actions and events unfold within a wider hostile environment where asylum-seekers are denounced as 'bogus' in the media; and who live as non-citizens; cannot decide where they live and have limited access to formal education and language classes (see Mayblin 2013). In this environment simply *being* is a struggle in itself.

## 8.

Returning to Bickford's (1996) concept of listening as central to any act of citizenship, it is possible to outline how a micro-politics of Deep listening can contribute to debates around alternate forms of citizenship. Listening as a practice of inter-subjective communication that takes the other seriously by engaging critically with what is said and heard whilst reflecting on the pre-conceptions of our own listening responses is essential for exploring the potential of everyday encounters. Listening as a form of 'active-yielding' (Taussig 1993) is a dialogic act that involves an ongoing process of learning new ways to listen with and to others whilst recognising how received power dynamics can limit our own capacities to listen across difference. A micro-politics of Deep listening explores local sites and scales of interaction in order to come to terms with a particular dilemma for refugee and asylum-seeker services: how does the state

imbue these sites whilst still leaving spaces open to political possibility? Listening politically in this way involves reflection/action that works towards questioning the received positions from which we listen and speak from within everyday encounters. Also, a micro-politics of Deep listening can be conceptualised as a form of audible citizenship in two intersecting ways: firstly, through the 'sonic geography of the voice' (Kanngieser 2012) and secondly, via the 'affective economy' of listening (Ahmed 2004).

Conceptualising listening as an act of audible citizenship resonates with the earlier expression of a politics of Deep listening attuned to verbal and non-verbal communication and the wider sonic environment in which everyday encounters unfold. Moreover, a focus on the voice (including non-verbal communication including body language) resonates with Maurizio Lazzarato, who writes that; 'affective and ethico-political forces are firstly expressed through the voice' (2009: 1). A statement that resonates with Anja Kanngiesser's (2012) concept of the 'geography of the voice', in which the oral and the aural intersect with social and spatial dimensions to shape a sensuous politics…

> 'in speaking and listening we create public dialogic spaces; we create worlds.
> Qualities such as pace, accent and dialect, intonation, frequency, amplitude and
> silence, invoke and reveal ways of being in these worlds, of class, gender, race,
> education and privilege'.
> (Kanngieser 2012: 348).

Certain norms of audibility shape the worlds in which we listen and speak and this is certainly relevant to the everyday spaces of refugee and asylum-seeker services. Returning to the contextualising of the asylum regime in the introduction of this thesis and the applications for Section 95 and 98 financial and accommodation support, these structures imbue listening positions and responses in the Advice Service and the Drop-in, where a wider culture of disbelief towards asylum-seekers can structure the regular communication between the immigration case workers and refugee and asylum-services. In this common scenario, the disembodied voice of a volunteer may be coded as white and legitimate by the Home Office worker on the other end of the

call. Whereas a West African or Arabic voice, that has a heavy accent may be interpreted as difficult or suspicious   (see Ellul-Knight 2019). This brief example highlights how an 'affective economy' may charge everyday interactions within refugee and asylum-services. To get the job done, the white coded voice is more appropriate because the worker assumes that it will cause less communicative friction with the Home Office worker, thus limiting the potential contribution of refugees and asylum-seekers in the life of the service.

A dilemma exists in these scenes where a volunteer or advice worker may think it necessary to speak on behalf of a 'client' because they might anticipate how the immigration officer on the other end of the phone may respond. If the worker does so, they may get what they need to get done quicker, but they do so by upholding the norms of audibility between the active, legitimate voice of the possibly 'white' volunteer/worker (who is also a citizen) and the passive asylum-seeker 'client' who needs assistance. Thus upholding the received boundaries of difference that circulate and suffuse refugee and asylum-services where people, even unwittingly, can find themselves listening like the state by reinforcing these distinctions (Ellul-Knight 2019). So far, the articulation of audible citizenship has focused on the affective capacities of the voice, but the voice needs to be understood as co-constitutive with a wider atmosphere, Therefore it is important to understand how voices merge and mingle with other material sounds and echo in different rooms. To do so, audible citizenship needs to be attuned to ambience.

9.

The ambient is ever-present; surrounding us, connecting us with others as well as the materials and things that resonate and echo in our everyday lives. Grasping at the more intangible aspects of sonority is Lauren Berlant's (2011) use of the term 'Ambient citizenship', which is used to explore the 'immediacy-pressures' that can come to define a situation or environment and how such circumstances define how different voices come to matter. For Berlant (2011), Ambient citizenship is…

'a mode of belonging […] that circulates through and around the political in formal and informal ways, with an affective, emotional, economic, and juridical force that is at once clarifying and diffuse.'
(Berlant 2011: 230).

Ambient citizenship is a call to develop an understanding of the wider sonic environment of the intimate encounters, spaces and sites in which everyday communication unfolds. A micro-politics of listening therefore, requires the listener to attune to the emotions and affects that circulate within public spaces in a way that resonates with Ahmed's (2004) concept of the 'affective economy'. A particular environment and the multitude of voices and sounds that are heard within it could create a mode of belonging to some, whilst simultaneously, these same sounds could work towards creating affective barriers that exclude others. For example: the sound of a police helicopter above a block of flats in a city may be reassuring to someone inside their flat, but the sonic presence of the police overhead may create a sense of fear or of being surveilled in other listeners vulnerable to the outside edge of the law. Ambient citizenship demonstrates what Kathleen Stewart (2007) has called the 'live-wire' nature of human agency, which involves been caught up in 'circuits, bodies, moves and connections' (2007: 86).

In this sense, audible citizenship involves ethico-political acts of Deep listening attuned to how particular atmospheres and sonic environments suffuse what is said and heard and how such diffuse surroundings circulate and define how certain voices are heard. Deep listening is a container for a conceptual framework and a practice of learning and unlearning ways of listening that aims to explore audible forms of citizenship within two refugee and asylum-seeker services. It is a multi-dimensional practice attuned to the intimate blending and merging of the intimate and public spheres and provides a robust concept for negotiating listening within the noisy, social and vibrant spaces that are the focus of this thesis.

Conclusion

This chapter has developed a conceptual framework for Deep listening by exploring the micro-politics of listening and how such a politics can be understood as an act of citizenship. In doing so, this chapter engaged a range of inter-disciplinary interlocutors beginning with Back (2007) and Oliveros (2003) who have both outlined a theory of Deep listening within their own respective disciplines (sociology and experimental music). Deep listening is an essential conceptual container for this project because it encourages a multi-dimensional approach to listening to the social world. A form of aural attention that focuses on what is said and heard in communicative interaction but is also attuned to the 'affective economy' (Ahmed 2004) of the wider sound world that envelopes more intimate interactions.

Listening is an ethico-political act because the ways in which we listen are educated. All listening  is imbued with wider social and political dynamics and it is the task of Deep listening to negotiate these pre-conceptions. In the context of the everyday encounters within refugee and asylum-seeker services, a micro-politics of Deep listening involves reflecting on our own and others listening responses and how we can listen otherwise to disrupt the norms of audibility that structure the wider hostile environment in which such organisations work. Situating Deep listening within the context of the everyday geographies of refugee and asylum-services provides another important conceptual framework. Audible citizenship situates the micro-politics of Deep listening within contemporary debates regarding alternative forms of citizenship that challenge statist modes of belonging that can formally exclude refugees and asylum-seekers. The concept of audible citizenship will be mobilised within the empirical chapters to make sense of Deep listening as a micro-political act through which participants negotiate their agency within the everyday spaces of both organisations.

Furthermore, the aural attention that this project develops resonates with the artist and audio investigator Lawrence Abu Hamdan's (2017) notion of a politics of listening. Hamdan urges us to move beyond  the 'classic notions of advocacy and of giving people a voice' and towards a politics that 'does not simply seek to amplify voices but

attempts to redefine what constitutes speech itself' (*my emphasis*, 2017: 70). As a concept, a politics of Deep listening aims to disrupt the norms of audibility by amplifying, or attuning to marginalised voices, but it also stresses the importance of attuning to the noisy interferences that charge and constitute the act of listening itself. In addressing the affective capacities of the voice and the ambiences and everyday atmospheres of refugee and asylum-seeker services this project requires a sensual form of research practice that can extend these concepts to be thought with in the doing of 'fieldwork'.

As Back states, 'listening to the world is not an automatic faculty but a skill that needs to be trained' (2007: 1). The next chapter will focus on Deep listening as a sonic ethnographic method that details how listening has been developed as a sensuous research practice within my overall methodological design. Learning to listen as a researcher is an important part of Deep listening as it gives an insight into how listening is an integral part of ethnographic practice and how the concepts I have so far discussed resonate within the messy realities of 'fieldwork' and provide an engaging vernacular for Deep listening as a method.

Chapter 2
Learning to listen

## Introduction

Building on Deep listening as an approach to the world developed in Chapter 1, this chapter focuses on the development of a methodology that enables such an approach

to be put into practice. In doing so, three inter-related practices of listening are outlined, these practices are: Dialogical listening, Ambient listening and Layered listening. To elaborate this approach to sonic ethnography, this chapter will tackle the following questions: What is a sonic ethnography? And how can we learn and unlearn ways of listening as an embodied process attuned to communicative interaction and the affective atmospheres that envelope and fine-tune encounters with difference?

In the process of developing these three listening practices I want to engage with the standpoint of the listening researcher through what I have called the tripartite position of the listening-researcher. As an observer-participant within the two refugee and asylum-seeker services my identity shifted between that of researcher-volunteer-friend. Understanding this as a tripartite position aims at getting to grips with the shifting grounds of reception and perception of the researcher. It is a way of attending to the complex position of emplaced research that shifts between that of an insider/volunteer and outsider/researcher. Focusing on the position of the tripartite researcher also makes a significant contribution to contemporary debates within cultural geographies about the role of Deep listening as an expanded and embodied method (Bennett et al 2015; Gallagher & Prior 2014).

Developing Deep listening as a ethnographic method is in part, a response to the ethnomusicologist, Deborah Kapchan's call for 'pedagogies of listening' that encourages the listening researcher to linger in the uncomfortable encounters of 'fieldwork' (2016: 287). By elucidating the tripartite research position I want to understand discomfort, difficulty and the possibility of failure as central to the process of doing ethnography. Research is necessarily uncomfortable because of the power dynamics at play between the researcher who traditionally observes and asks questions of a participant who is obliged to then speak and whose voice is the conduit to 'truth' (Mazzei & Jackson 2010). Engaging the difficulties of research encourages a methodological reflection on how we come to listen to others and interpret their voices in the affective motion of the research encounter. To engage with discomfort and failure within research I will outline how my approach has been influenced by post-colonial

feminisms (Thein 2005; Tolia-Kelly 2006) and non-representational ethnography (Vannini 2015).

In this chapter, Deep listening will be explored via the three listening practices that are essential to traditional and more experimental ethnographic methods. Although the three listening practices have been divided into separate sections, it is important to emphasise that Dialogic, Ambient and Layered listening are entangled and inform each other. For example, in any particular research encounter you can listen directly to what is said, but you can also attune to the wider sonic environment as the interaction unfolds within a wider atmosphere. To highlight the inter-connected nature of these three distinct listening practices a single narrative from my listening diary will be elaborated upon across the three sections. This vignette will be re-articulated to demonstrate the multiple sonic dimensions of the research encounter and how they require different practices of attunement from the researcher. However, the first section of this chapter will focus on the theoretical-methodological rationale of this approach to sonic ethnography.

The ethnographic ear

Ethnography can be described as a research process that combines fieldwork that unfolds over a long period of time; uses a mixed-methodology that typically includes participant-observation; whilst focussing on the relationships between the researcher and researched as well as how experiences and practices are part of wider societal processes (Skeggs 2001: 6).

My methodology draws upon feminist ethnographic approaches influenced by post-colonial feminist theory (Bhavnani 2001; Coddington 2017), as well as non-representational ethnography (Vannini 2015) and sonic geographies (Gallagher et al 2017) to explore listening as an embodied process that lingers in the uncomfortable spaces of the research encounter. Although my approach is influenced by some more outwardly experimental practices, it also resembles established ethnographic practice that relates to the above description.

My sonic ethnography is based around a 10-month period of participation within two refugee and asylum-seeker organisations and it incorporates a mixed-methodology to engage with communicative interactions and affective atmospheres of these diverse spaces. So in some ways it resembles a more traditional ethnographic approach, but what makes an ethnography sonic and distinct from more established approaches?

As the previous engagement with Back's Deep listening demonstrated, listening has an important role to play in more established disciplines (such as sociology) because it offers a way of re-tuning our senses to listen again to the 'ordinary yet remarkable things found in everyday life' (2007: 1). A sonic ethnographic approach is distinct from more traditional approaches because it develops an 'ethnographic ear', or ways of hearing culture (see Erlmann 2000) where it is possible to understand different forms of knowing that consider the affective and visceral registers of multi-sensory human existence. Through engaging with these ideas, this chapter will develop a multi-dimensional practice of listening that explores ways of knowing from the ear.

## 2.1

As a research method, listening needs to be understood as an ongoing pedagogical process that involves learning and unlearning ways of listening. Active listening is an established skill within research methods such as participant-observation and semi-structured interviews and these two approaches have been incorporated into the research design of this thesis.

However, a listening method that aims to grapple with the affective and embodied nature of doing research needs to expand beyond the usual focus of what is heard and recorded in an interview scenario, which tends to focus on what is said. Developing listening as an embodied method is allied to developments within sensory ethnography, where research participation is understood 'as a process of learning through the ethnographer's own multi-sensory, emplaced experiences' (Pink, 2015: 96). However, despite a plethora of ethnographic research where listening has been developed as a method (see Waldock 2016 for the previous chapter and also Chandola 2013 and (Bull

2000), it has been noted by Walter Gershon (2013), that sound and listening 'lags behind' visual methods within sensory ethnographic approaches. This chapter contributes to developing listening  as a method capable of getting to grips with verbal and non-verbal communication and the affective environments in which we listen. In doing so, I will reflect upon my own listening practice by exploring the various frictions that occur through the adoption of a tripartite researcher identity that grapples with the roles of researcher-volunteer-friend.

I define my role within both the Drop-in and the Advice Service as a researcher-participant because I participated in the life of each organisation as a volunteer - working on the reception desk; doing small pieces of advice work; preparing meals and cooking - alongside my role as a researcher. By participating in the life of each organisation I was using my experience volunteering in these services and the skills I have developed in a practical way, but it also allowed me to build relationships with staff, volunteers and refugee and asylum-seeker client's of both services. Negotiating a tripartite identity involved reiterating my position with each service so that people were aware of my role. As I was engaging in volunteer work, it also meant that I had to make my position clear to the staff, who on occasion may give me more complicated tasks to do when I really wanted to make use of my time to build-up particular relationships with certain Drop-in attendees.

As a participatory-researcher learning to attune to the visceral registers and atmospheric affects of human existence, listening involves inhabiting 'the flows of surrounding sonority [that] can be heard to weave an individual into a larger social fabric' (LaBelle 2010: xxi). A shifting field of perception where, as Deborah Kapchan states, 'sound forces an encounter between the […] self-owning subject' and the 'sound body': a 'body with malleable boundaries that transforms according to the environment' and that 'emerges in the paradox of being a part of and yet distinct from the social field of listening' (2016: 115). Both LaBelle (2010) and Kapchan's (2016) statements about the shifting sense of sound resonate with the discussion in the last chapter which claimed that listening was a process of active yeilding (see Taussig 1993). Rather than uphold the distinction between the active/passive, active yeilding

addresses the tension between these two states and this better fits with the intersubjective nature of communication discussed previously (Bickford 1996) and with what Kapchan (2016) calls the malleable sound body. It is through these formulations of listening, and how interactions with sounds create a paradox where the listener is both part of and distinct from the social field, that I want to situate the tripartite identity of the listening researcher.

All research positions are loaded with social and cultural baggage and unequal power dynamics that situated us in the 'field' (see Bhavnani 2001; Kapoor 2017; Manning 2016 & Skeggs 2001). As a method, listening intimately links us with the social world whilst it 'brings subjects into being in ways that matter' (LaBelle 2010: xvii; Pratt 2010:349). The tripartite identity of the researcher - which can shift between the positions of research-volunteer-friend - emerges in the paradox of sound. The researcher is both apart of and yet distinct from the social field of research and this is emphasised by the shifting field of aural attention. As a ethnographer participating in the life of each organisation voices, sounds and social rhythms coarse through the body; charging the research encounter and affecting the motion of our own and other's emotions.

The researcher-volunteer may be listening to a participant speak about their child's new school, or the issues they have been having with their house. The encounter is friendly; enjoyable as you get to know each other through sharing stories, and as you build up a trusting relationship your role starts to shift between that of friend and researcher. But at some point the interaction goes awry; emotions rise to the surface that you didn't know were there and the atmosphere shifts. The tripartite identity is not such a thing you can turn turn on/off; nor are you fully in-control of what happens. It is a research identity that involves an 'ethics of attunement' sensitive to the ways in which asymmetrical relations of class; culture; race and gender affect our communication and structure how we are able to listen to and with others (Wilson 2017).

It is my contention that listening is a method that can and should attend to the difficult moments of research, whilst embracing the keenly felt, visceral failures and ruptures of

the research encounter (Wilson 2017: 465). The tripartite position of the researcher involves taking risks and it is uncomfortable because of its shifting and volatile nature, which in part, exposes the unequal power dynamics that structure research engagement.

Feminist approaches to ethnography have been important for understanding the shifting position of the listening-researcher (see Skeggs 2001). Feminist ethnographic research ethics involve dealing with the dilemmas of engaged, participatory practice where the researcher works in solidarity with participants (Davis & Craven 2016). In such intimate surrounds, the researcher can become attached to people and places; friendships can flourish, and because of this the ethnographer has to be carefully attuned to the ways greater attachment could lead to 'placing the research subjects at a greater risk of manipulation and betrayal by the ethnographer' (Stacey 1988, cited in Skeggs 2001: 17). Like in the brief, fictional research encounter described above, from a position of solidarity, friendships may emerge. However, it is important to have a critical understanding of friendship in research because it can be strategically framed. As Ahmed writes; 'ethnographers need to make friends with strangers, and in this relationship, some people are knowers and others are known' (2000: 66). Learning to listen as a researcher; shifting between the positions of researcher-volunteer-friend involves lingering in uncomfortable encounters because of what it reveals about how those interactions can become fine-tuned by the dominant norms of audibility.

This does not mean that I am discouraging of friendly relationships with research participants; rather, what I am advocating is a research process that challenges easy access to the voice of the research participant through embracing the ongoing struggle of working through the asymmetrical relationships of the research encounter. In this section, I have touched upon the emotional and affective registers of listening as a dilemma of emplaced research. In what follows, I will sustain my engagement with feminist ethnography whilst introducing approaches to non-representational ethnography. By doing so, I want to situate my own research in the debates around emotion and affect within the wider field of cultural geographies affective turn (see O'Grady 2018).

2.2

Feminist geographers have pushed the agenda of emotion and affect within geography, and many scholars in this diverse field view the 'turn to affect' as a vital extension of contemporary theory (Tolia-Kelly 2006; Fischer 2016). Nevertheless, Anu Koivunen states that such a turn never really occurred and that 'new' theories of affect 'are continuous with a feminist tradition of engaging with emotion and affective capacities' (2010: 22).

Phillip Vannini (2014) writes that non-representational methods - including ethnographic practice - are wide-ranging, and attempt to capture diverse work that strives to cope with the fleeting, viscous, lively, embodied, non-discursive dimensions of complex lifeworlds. In particular, non-representational ethnography examines events, which 'inevitably highlight not instrumental plans, blueprints for actions, and a priori scripts and conditions but rather […] the failure of representations, the contingencies of interventions, and the effervescence with which things actually take place' (Vannini 2014: 7). From this description, it is clear that non-representational approaches share some common ground with the ephemeral nature of sound and of developing an extended practice of listening attuned to ambience and the wider fluctuating sonic environment. It is important to highlight some of the key contentions between feminist and non-representational ethnography especially when affect and emotion are integral to understanding listening as a practice of research.

In considering how emotion and affect have been used within geographic scholarship, Deborah Thien (2005) cites the central importance that the philosopher, Brian Massumi (2002) has had on the development of non-representational theory (see McCormack 2003, 2004; Thrift 2008). A tension exists in the definitions of affect and emotion and this hinges upon Massumi's (2002) distinction. Massumi reserves the term affect to describe the charged perceptual responses that animate the body without being assimilated as subjective content (2002: 27-28). Therefore, affects are understood as part of the 'pre-subjective interface of the body with the sensory world it inhabits, a linkage registered at the visceral, the proprioceptive, and other sites where memory

lodges itself in the body' (Hirshkind 2006: 82). On the other hand, Massumi writes that emotion is a qualified intensity: 'a 'sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal' (2002: 28). Within some strains of non-representational approaches, affect is valorised as a vitalising energy that is pre-cognitive; an energy that loses its creative potential when it is rendered fixed and functional by the subject.

Emotions then, tend to put a dampener on the event's live-wire affective potential; leaving scant space for the agency of people, who 'have little or no agency over their bodies or environments but are under the control of affective forces' (Thrift & Amin 2013: 161). Such a provocative rendering of the subject sits uncomfortably with the unequal power dynamics that are present within the ethnographers position and the micro-politics of listening that this thesis sets out to explore. The distinction between affect/emotion set up by Massumi (2002) also seemingly reinforces the dualisms of mind/body and personal/political that feminist approaches strive to dismantle (Thien 2005: 452). Towards a feminist understanding of the interplay between affect/emotion, Ahmed has written that:

> 'emotions create the very effect of surfaces and boundaries that allow us to
> distinguish between an inside and an outside […] so emotions are not simply
> something 'I' or 'we' have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to
> objects and others, that surfaces and  boundaries are made - the 'I' and the
> 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of contact with others'.
> (Ahmed: 2004: 9)

In other words, affect is the motion of emotion and in the context of this sonic ethnography, listening involves attuning to the unequal power dynamics of affect and how emotion ripples across the contagious research encounter. This is why feminist and post-colonial scholars are weary of such dualistic distinctions, and have called for further attention to be paid to the differences between bodies. With this in mind, Anoop Nayak (2010), suggests that researchers interested in emotional and affective geographies should attend to the 'constellation of feeling, practices, and imaginaries

that breath life into the ways differently situated bodies can affect and be affected' (2010: 2371). In contrast, more non-representational approaches have been criticised for being insufficiently concerned with power, injustice and politics, where 'group identities appear to be thought of as either products of representational or structural thinking […] and therefore, to be fixed and pre-given' (Cresswell 2012: 102). Feminist and non-representational approaches to ethnographic practice have been important in the formulation of my research design and the contentions between how affect and emotion are defined is important in understanding listening as a research practice.

My own ethnographic attitude is aligned with the post-colonial feminist understanding because this gets to grips with the power dynamics that are present within my own field of research. The approach to Deep listening that develops an understanding of how communication is enveloped and charged by wider structural affects resonates with research within geography that deals with the ethics and politics of more-than, or non-representational phenomena. Angharad Closs-Stephens' work on the affective atmospheres of nationalism uses this concept to offer 'ways of loosening the grip of the language of identity, essence and belonging in the study of nationalism, and attending to the currents and transmissions that pass between bodies and which congeal around particular objects, materials and bodies in specific times and spaces' (2016: 24). The language of circulation and transmission between bodies recalls how Ahmed (2004) describes the 'affective economy' of emotion that charge bodies and materials but do not inhabit anyone or anything in particular. Therefore, a concept of Deep listening that is attuned to the affective economies the public sphere contributes an auditory critique to this literature within cultural and political geographies (see also: Anderson & Wilson 2018 & Darling 2014).

2.3
This research project is an ally of feminist approaches to the 'affective economies' of research. What I want to emphasise is a processual approach to the ethics of

attunement; one that attends to the uncomfortable, awkward, or difficult encounters experienced within research. The ethnographic accounts produced by such forms reflect on how the 'voice' of others is positioned within them and as Kate Coddington writes; such accounts can disrupt 'smooth narratives of knowledge production as linear processes [to] challenging the right of the scholar to the voice - and the knowledge - in question' (2017: 12).

Emphasising the difficulties of listening to, then writing/recording the 'voices ' of others, resonates with what Phillip Vannini (2014) sets out as the aim of non-representational forms of ethnography. Vannini writes that non-representational ethnography is 'borne out of a disorderly will to experiment and to fail - indeed to try and continue to fail better' (2014: 327). Comparing the two quotes here from Coddington (2017) and Vannini (2014), failure is inherent in any ethnographic account that attempts a linear narrative controlled by a single author because the 'voices' that are recorded do not fit neatly into a linear narrative and the live-wire nature of the more-than-representational world cannot be grasped by a single account.

In the above quote, Vannini (2014) is paraphrasing a oft-quoted phrase from Samuel Beckett's Worstward Ho, and the intention to fail better strikes a chord with my own work. The paragraph that the paraphrase is lifted from reads: 'first the body. No. First the place. No. First both. Now either' (2014: 101). In this terse, rhythmic phrase it is possible to find a different tone to failure, one that resonates with the position of the embodied listener. Reading the phrase, you are jostled in-and-out of place in a stop-start rhythm that shifts between body, then place, then either. The feeling of this movement as you read it is reminiscent of the paradox of listening I discussed earlier, where the researcher is moved by the sounds that surround; producing a subjectivity that is awkwardly emplaced with other bodies that are  situated differently. Moreover, grappling with  uncomfortableness, or awkwardness invokes a shade of failure because it involves recognising the limits of your own voice and tests the researcher's ability to listen to others. What you are then responsible for as the producer of an ethnographic account is an unsmooth narrative that grapples with the frictions of the research encounter.

In the three listening practices that I want to focus on, a feminist ethnographic approach provides the coordinates for navigating the charged everyday spaces of refugee and asylum-seeker support services. The importance of the uncomfortable encounter returns us to the conceptual side of Deep listening, as a micro-politics of listening is also attuned to moments of discomfort that might be felt by someone who's listening response reinforces certain preconditions about the person they are interacting with and requires them to listen differently. In relation to the conceptual explorations of the previous chapter, this chapter focuses on is a ethics of learning to listen to others and the practices of listening that were developed as an ethnographic method. However, before introducing the three practices of listening I want to give some context for the two organisations where my research took place.

## Views from somewhere

2.4

My fieldwork period was between September 2017 to June 2018 when I spent one day per week at each organisation as a participant-researcher. Prior to starting my PhD research, I trained as a social worker, where I undertook a placement with the Advice Service and kept in touch with the organisation. Approaching the Advice Service to conduct research was straight forward as I continued to volunteer with the service so I approached the Project Manager with my proposal. The Drop-in is part of the same network of refugee and asylum-seeker organisations in Greater Manchester so I got to know the service through my work at the Advice Service. I approached the drop-in via email and the Manager of the service invited me to have an informal discussion about my project. In the first few months my position was of a volunteer who made their position as a researcher clear; this means that I introduced myself as a researcher, but I didn't commit to any formal research activities, such as interviews or formal participant-observation. In these first few months it was important to build-up a good working relationship with the staff members, volunteers and attendees at both organisations, as well as gaining a clear understanding of the various projects that the service was engaged in.

The careful process of feeling my way into the research is reminiscent of the 'slow craft of scholarly work' that Back (2007) advocates for, and which was discussed in the previous chapter in relation to Deep listening. In tune with this sentiment is Liza Grandia, who also advocates for a slow ethnographic process, out of which 'an emergent counter hegemonic process tied with rebuilding accountable relationships with […] marginalised peoples at a proper pace' can be established (2015: 312). In research design terms, a slow and careful approach of building relationships and making connections can be described as a method of snow ball sampling (Cohen & Arieli 2011).

Snow-balling (however slowly) has been described as an important method when attempting to gain access to 'hidden', or 'hard-to-reach' communities whilst establishing trust amongst potential research participants (Valdez & Kaplan 2005). Part of gaining this trust involves taking seriously the lives of others - engaging with people over a long period of time in order to demonstrate your commitment and respect for the individuals and the organisation.

A long-term volunteer of the Drop-in organisation pushed this point home to me one afternoon when they complained that some people who come to do research appear one day, do their interviews and then leave. Such an approach could be described as an ethnographic 'hit-and-run' (Wax 1997: 55). An extractive method of doing research that doesn't engage in the slow process of relationship building, nor does it linger in the difficulties of doing so as a participant researcher. A slow, snow balling method was essential as it enabled me to negotiate the relationships that allowed my sonic ethnography to flourish.

2.5

The Drop-in and Advice Service are two of the more established organisations assisting refugees and asylum-seekers in Greater Manchester. Both organisations have had a presence in the area since the early 2000s when services for asylum-seekers were needed when Greater Manchester was designated as a key 'dispersal area' under the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act (1999 Act). The introduction to this thesis discussed the wider context in greater detail, but it is important to reiterate here that the dispersal regime in the UK, that provides basic financial support and accommodation on a no choice basis - has been thoroughly critiqued for producing the marginality of asylum-seekers (Darling 2014; Bloch & Schuster 2002; Gill 2016). It is also important to reiterate that legislation such as the 1999 Act and the more recent 2014 Immigration Bill that requires private landlords, bank workers and estate agents to check immigration status and therefore act as border control, is part of a hostile environment towards refugees, asylum-seekers (and other migrants) and that this is the context in which both the Drop-in and the Advice Service operate.

*The Drop-in*

Entrance

Reception

Advice Office

Tea & Coffee
Table

Kitchen

Tables & Chairs for
Visitors

Male Toilet

Second Hand Shop

Female Toilet

Partitioned spaces for Advice
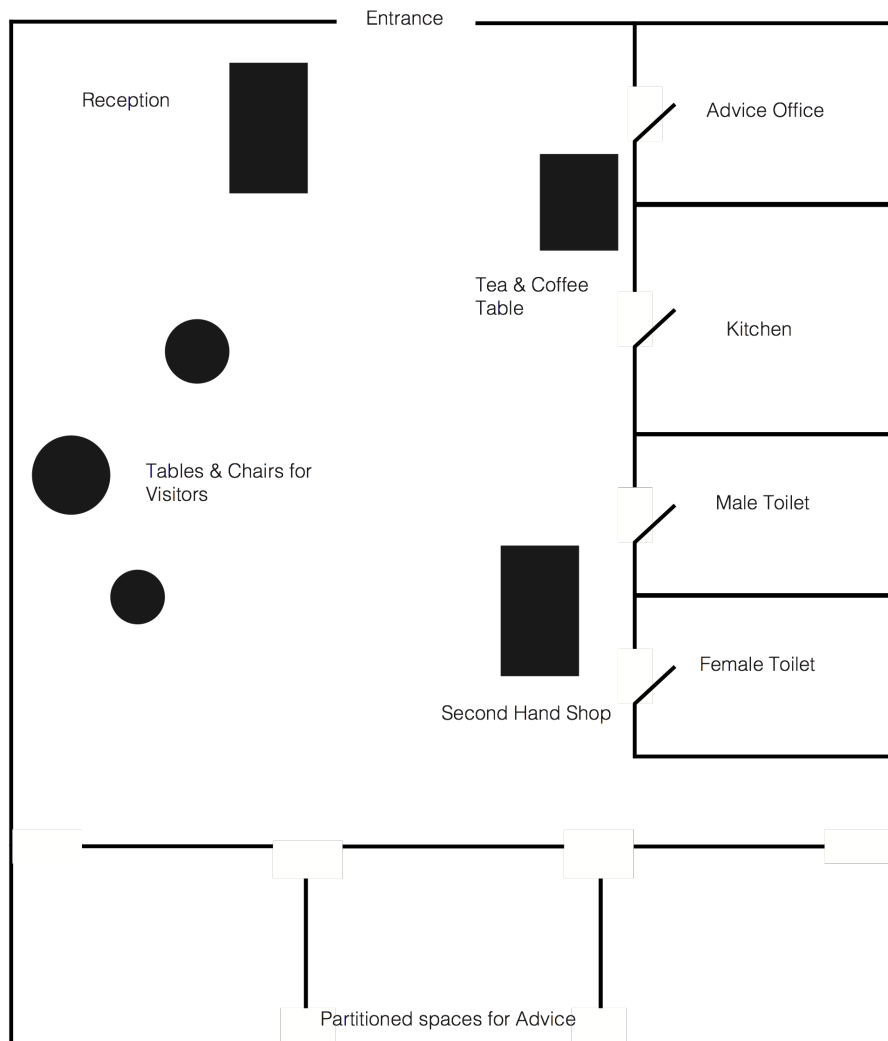
The Drop-in organisation sets out to work with people legally defined as 'asylum seekers'; 'refugees' as well as others who do not fit neatly into either category, to

provide social space; advice and advocacy for all who need it. However, the majority of people who came to the drop-in during my fieldwork had refugee status, and were navigating the vagaries of mainstream benefits (such as Universal Credit and Housing Benefit)[11]. Whereas, asylum-seeker 'clients' are excluded from these benefits as they have 'no recourse to public funds' and therefore, receive accommodation and financial support under the regulation of the 1999 Asylum Act.

In the Drop-in, one of the most pressing issues that the organisation continues to face is the transition period that people go through when they are granted refugee status. My volunteer role consisted of some light case work with 'clients', which involved assisting people with issues ranging from setting up a Universal Credit account to registering with a housing association. In the mornings, I regularly worked on the reception desk, which involves greeting people as they come into the main hall and registering them.

The drop-in is based in a church attached to a community hall and it is open 2-days a week for advice; more involved case work; as well as English classes; computer courses; wellbeing activities such as a choir, and a communal lunch. The drop-in opens at 9:30, and when I arrive there'd usually be a small group of people already waiting outside - people who want advice are encouraged to come early as 'it's first come first served' - and this means that some people can get to the church around 6:00 in the morning (rain or shine).

In the morning, the sound of breakfast radio fills the main hall as workers and volunteers set up the space; the perky banter of the radio presenters and pop music dominate. But by 11:00, when people have started to filter in to the hall this sound is drowned out by conversations in mixtures of Amharic, Kurdish, Arabic, English; by chairs scraped into formations of friends; and children playing between the tables. After lunch, the tempo shifts as people drift out of the main hall to join the English class so

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[11] In the UK, Universal Credit is a social security benefit that was introduced in 2013 by the Conservative Government and implemented in stages. For more information on the roll out of Universal Credit, please see: 'Universal Credit Timetable', accessed Sept 04, 2018, https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/universal_credit_housing_costs/universal_credit_timetable

that only a few lingerers remain. All these activities take place in the informal caring-chaos of the main social space.

*The Advice Service*

Entrance

Appointment Room

Waiting Room

"Goldfish Bowl" Appointment Room

Reception

Glass Panel

Set of desks allocated to the Asylum Destitution Project and where Mark, the Project Manager sits.

Banks of desks for different teams within the organisation.
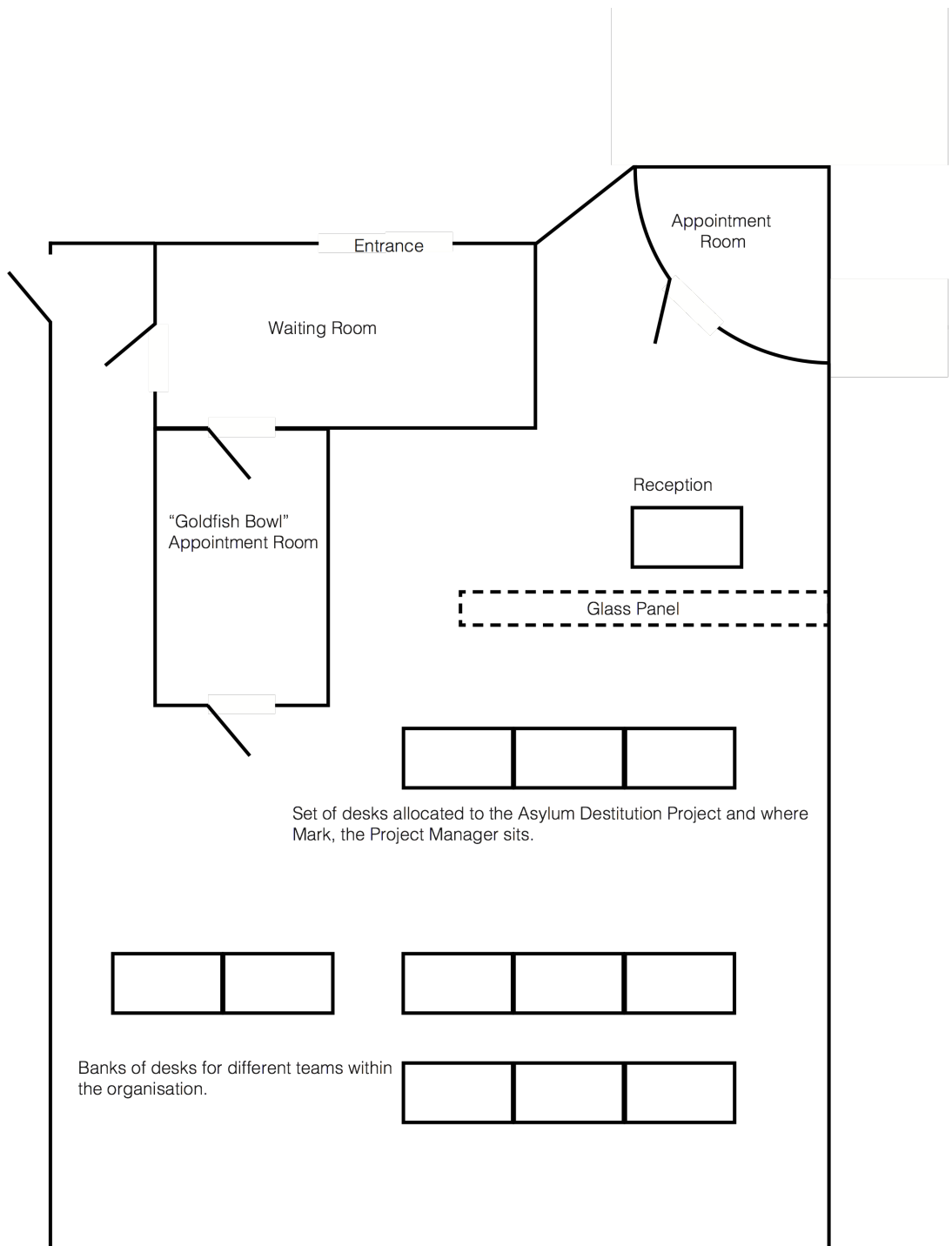
The Advice Service has a specific remit (determined by the funding they receive) that means that they only provide advice and advocacy for asylum-seekers who needed

assistance with their accommodation and financial support (section 95 and 98 of the 1999 Act). The project's main focus is to assist 'clients' with their applications for the accommodation and financial support they are entitled to under the 1999 Act. Therefore, I mainly worked with people who had applied for asylum in the UK.

A typical day at the service starts at 09:45; I would come into the office and meet the project manager and the other volunteers; at this point, the Project Manager would summaries the day's appointments and allocate work. Usually, there would be four appointments per day - two at 10:00 and two at 14:00 - and these could last anywhere between 30 minutes to 2 hours and beyond (depending on the complexity of the case). As a volunteer-researcher I would usually take one appointment as a volunteer leading on an appointment and in a second I would observe an appointment between a staff member/volunteer and an asylum-seeker client. I would also work on the reception, letting clients into the office and registering and booking in new clients for appointments.

The Advice Service is not a drop-in, but it used to be and people still dropped in without an appointment, usually brandishing papers headed with the Home Office logo. Such visitors were not ignored; they would be spoken to at the reception and either given an appointment or 'signposted' to another organisation that could assist them.

A digital radio provides the background sound for the office; playing a mixture of Classic FM and BBC 6 Music to accompany the business of people passing through; the sound of photocopier's jamming and the buzzing dial-up connection of the fax machine.

Daily work at the Advice Service has a more formal flow and the office area is generally a lot quieter than the Drop-in because there is no open social space where people mingle. Instead, the Advice Service has a reception area where 'clients' wait for their appointment; at the reception desk there's a bell - the kind who might find at the reception of a hotel - that can be used if someone needs to raise the attention of a worker.

When workers and volunteers call a 'client' through from the reception they have to go through a security door - operated by a wallet-sized key card - and then go through to one of the meeting rooms. There are two rooms in the downstairs office and another two rooms upstairs. All the meeting rooms are sparsely furnished with a desk, chairs and a PC; some of the rooms have a few children's toys and a fan, which is needed as the rooms get hot and uncomfortable when the weather is sunny.

If I was leading on an appointment as a volunteer case worker I would start by introducing myself and ask the 'client' if they were okay and if they wanted a hot drink. The appointments are formally choreographed but friendly and empathetic; they take place with the worker/volunteer on one side of the table and the 'client' at the other.

However, how each appointment unfolded could be far from orderly or straight forward: sometimes it would be impossible to get hold of an interpreter, meaning the appointment would stall, and whilst waiting for one to become available, you would try to make small talk across a language barrier. On other occasions small children will be present, getting bored and fidgety in long meetings and people could become upset or confused as you ask them questions about their lives; personal details required for the Home Office applications. Some of these personal details seem functional, such as those regarding where a person might have lived whilst in the UK. Nonetheless, these details may still be suffused with a trauma that sits under the surface of things.

What I have described here and through the accompanying maps are the intimate, everyday geographical settings for the empirical focus of this thesis. The different micro-spaces, such as 'the main hall' and 'goldfish bowl', will be referred to in the empirical chapters and the maps will be useful to orientate you in the organisational layout.

2.6

Initially, the reason for choosing two different research sites was comparative as I thought that they would offer a productive contrast to each other. My first impression of the Drop-in was that it was very social and a slightly chaotic space; there is just so much going on as advice sessions, computer courses and English classes, choir practice and a communal lunch all happen in a single day. Whereas, the Advice Service appeared to have a much more rigid, bureaucratic structure that reminded me of statutory social work services, or a Citizens Advice Bureau. There is much more of an organised flow to the work where 'clients' turn up for a specific appointment that is booked in advance and they wait in a reception area that is separate from the office. However, as I got deeper into the research I realised that the distinction between the more ordered work of the Advice Service and the messy sociality of the Drop-in was far too neat a divide. Both organisations are messy contested sites with diverse histories, cultures and structures, that I needed to attune to as a listening-researcher.

'Messy ethnography' is a notion John Law (2004) uses to understand social assemblages as complex and diffuse. In doing so he asks: what 'textures' of social reality are traditional social science methods missing out on? (2004: 1-2). Messy approaches to research resonate with the feminist and non-representational approaches to ethnography I described in the previous section, and the concept of messiness in research has been taken up by Kye Askins and Rachel Pain (2011), in their own research that challenges the boundaries between the researcher/researched through participatory arts methods.

The methods of listening employed throughout my research were developed across both sites of my research and it is important to understand them as embodied practices that immerse the participant researcher in the messy realities of each organisation. The sections that cover the three listening practices will interpret a single narrative vignette to explore how each different practice demands a different form of attunement from the listening researcher. This narrative is drawn from my listening diary that I kept throughout my fieldwork.

## 2.7

As a method, Deep listening develops three ethnographic listening practices, which are Dialogical, Ambient and Layered listening. The listening diary was used as a textual space of contact where details were recorded about listening encounters, ambiences, conversations, and the face-to-face appointments I observed. Bringing the distinct, yet inter-related listening practices into contact on the page.

This approach to Deep listening and the sonic ethnographic methods used is in tune with current debates within cultural geography around experimental narrative approaches in academic writing attentive to 'emotions; situated knowledges and different modes of perception' (Rabbiosi & Vanolo 2017: 267). Following this, I have found that the listening diary has been a crucial space to develop a form of 'contact writing, or a writing about contact' attuned to the affective atmosphere in which communication unfolds (Ahmed 2000: 125). Listening is a form of contact: it affects our bodies and moves in ways we cannot fully grasp and sound writing involves the assemblage of these traces - all the audio; written accounts and other recordings that we endeavour to produce, and that form the incoherent whole of this thesis.

The narrative used in the following sections is an interpretation of an encounter between myself and Rezan (a pseudonym) that took place in the Drop-in when we were both volunteering on the reception desk. Throughout the thesis, the names of participants are pseudonyms and all participants who formally contributed to my research - for example: those who were interviewed or where formally observed - granted their consent verbally or in writing.

## Dialogic listening

Dialogic listening focuses on the intersubjective motion of communication between research participants. As a research method it is commonly associated with active listening that is a technique used with semi-structured interviews (Ayres 2008). Due to this association I will begin this section by discussing how approaches to listening have shaped my own learning to listen in relation to my professional training as a social

worker. In discussing how I began to listen within professional acts of care I will return to the tripartite identity of the listening-researcher.

## 2.8

In an introductory email sent to the manager of the Drop-in I included the following sentence: 'as well as conducting research, I want to contribute to the service as a volunteer, making use of my experience working in the asylum sector and as a social worker (Private Correspondence, 2017). In this important email in which I introduced myself to the Drop-in I wanted to present myself as a competent 'professional'. By referring to myself as a social worker I wanted to legitimise my proposed presence in the organisation, whilst opening the necessary gateways so I could conduct the project. Positioning myself as a researcher in this way led me back to reflect on the ethics and politics of my training as a caring professional and the listening education I underwent when training as a social worker.

During the period I worked as a hospital and community social worker in Greater Manchester I did not work with asylum-seekers. People who have claimed asylum are deemed to have 'No Recourse To Public Funds', and 'a person with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) cannot access certain welfare benefits, homelessness assistance from the council and an allocation of social housing through the council's register' (NRPF Network 2018). Although my social work training was informed by anti-racist practices and a knowledge of the potential 'gatekeeping' role of the profession (Dominelli 2017), the communication practices that formed a major part of my education were tested by the practicing of social work within community and a hospital setting which have been transformed by the austerity policies that began with the Coalition Government in the UK (2010-2015).

The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) states that austerity intensifies issues that isolate service users and social care professionals from the wider community; reducing the workforce in times of increasing workload; increasing staff stress and mental health issues and the ethical dilemmas attached to service user needs and the reduced levels of service (BASW 2018). Michael Lavalette (2017) writes that it is

essential for social work practitioners to understand the impact austerity has on the people and communities they are working with as well as the changes it is bringing to public welfare services. Moreover, it is imperative to understand that the social work labour process is being transformed by austerity through the institutionalisation of managerialism which turns social workers into the 'rationers of care' (Lavalette 2017: 37)[12].

Austerity has limited the ability of social workers to adequately 'care' and the dilemmas, frustrations and stresses that result from service reduction imbue the intimate, face-to-face encounters that form the everyday encounters of professional caring work. Reflecting on the position of the social worker, particularly the distinction between the pedagogy of social work and the realities of practice raised an important question: how does a social worker listen as a 'rationer of care', or as a gatekeeper to ever diminishing services? Whether it is in a statutory role, or as a volunteer-researcher in a third sector setting, listening is never a neutral practice. It is important to reflect on how we come to listen and the wider contexts that shape how we listen to others.

The introductory email I sent to the Drop-in is an example of me using the caring capital I had accrued through my previous training. My social work education should be credited with encouraging me to work with asylum-seekers and to think of social work as social justice work, but it is important to begin here because it is also where I was introduced to listening as a particular skill. Unpacking this pedagogy of listening is important because it is marked by a distinction between active and Dialogic listening.

## 2.9

Active listening is a valued communicative practice in a wide range of fields from nursing (Bryant 2007), education (McNaughton et al 2007), public administration (Stein 2009) and crisis negotiation (Royce 2005) amongst others. In a practice guide for social workers, Pamela Trevithick writes that 'active listening describes a special and

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[12] Please see the work of Social Workers Without Borders for more information on how radical social work practice challenged the statutory limits of the profession to work with vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers.

demanding alertness on the part of the listener, where the aim is to listen closely to the details of what is conveyed and to ensure that the person is aware that this is happening' (2011: 172). As a practice, active listening involves verbal techniques, such as 'restating a paraphrased version of the speaker's message, asking questions when appropriate, and maintaining moderate to high nonverbal conversational involvement' so that the 'client' feels heard (Weger et al 2014: 13). My approach to practicing Dialogic listening registers with these definitions of active listening, so it is unsurprising that some researchers use the terms interchangeably (see Weger et al 2014: 13). However, I think it's important to make a distinction because active listening - which sets up a dualism between active and passive - is unable to deal with listening as a form of multi-sensuous contact.

The term Dialogic was used by Mikhail Bahktin (1986) to develop a social theory of linguistic understanding where language is understood as a shared event. For Bahktin, 'each word tastes of the context or contexts in which it has lived its socially intense life' (Bahktin cited in Hirshkop & Shepherd 1989: 16). By evoking the dialogical, I want to stress that listening involves tuning into the complex noisy-social interferences of being-in-the-world; one that is multi-sensuous, visceral and charged with myriad expectations. As a researcher, listening involves a struggle to come to terms with what snaps into place in the receptive states formed with others.

My aim in making a distinction between active and Dialogic listening is to get to grips with the tripartite identity of the participant-researcher. Active listening fails to grasp the oscillating agency of listening that is essential to the Deep listening that has been so far outlined as a conceptual and methodological practice. Therefore, Dialogical listening should also be understood via Taussig's (1993) notion of 'active yielding'. Dialogic listening is sensitive to the tensions that run between passivity and control within inter-subjective communication. It is a process of reflecting on how you listen; how you are listened to and how our worlds are made and re-made within face-to-face encounters. Moreover, what is said and heard within research encounters is obviously important but it is equally essential is to attune to more-than what can be visually and aurally

observed. Therefore, Dialogic listening is a collective performance charged by the affective motion of emotion that ripples in-out-and-around entangled subjects.

Dialogic listening as an embodied research practice that is allied with other forms of sensory/embodied methods that aim 'to explore promising tools and techniques for non-dualist thought and pedagogy' (Sedgwick 2003: 1). What I have made clear in these two chapters is that Deep listening aims to challenge dualistic patterns within knowledge production and to trouble the traditional positivist insistence of objectivity and distance. Still, it is important to recognise the empirical and ethical conflicts at stake in such practices. Especially when the tripartite position of the researcher-volunteer-friend is considered. In both organisations my volunteering role was woven into my position as a researcher (in fact, they were inter-dependent practices) and this can cause some confusion. Could people in the Drop-in or the Advice Service speak to me with confidence knowing that they could be the subject of an entry in my listening diary?

Throughout the period of my research I was open about my dual identity as a volunteer and researcher and in doing so, I approached the ethics of consent as a situated process. This involved reiterating my status as a researcher and entering into conversations about it when people asked me questions (McCurdy & Uldam, 2015; Perez, 2017). The regularity of my presence at both organisations also helped me with gaining the trust of participants and helped me build an insider position within both organisations. This insider perspective gave me the opportunity to understand the daily realities and routines of the work done by each organisation.  It is vitally important for the ethnographer not to take this insider position for granted as the researcher who participates is always awkwardly emplaced. Yes, I volunteered and got to know some of the workers, staff and attendees of each organisation personally and whilst friendships did develop, it is important that these friendly relationships did not obscure existing relations of inequality and privilege related to my position as a white, male researcher with full citizenship status (Davis & Craven 2017: 60).

As a research practice, Dialogic listening should be attuned to the vacillating, in-and-out of place nature of ethnographic practice (Bennett et al 2014; Helin 2013). By doing so, it is possible to hold onto and reflect upon the uncomfortable dynamics that can charge a research encounter. I will demonstrate this by introducing the narrative, feeling the weight of a room, that features an encounter with Rezan. Through this I will discuss these difficulties and introduce Dialogic listening as a skill used with observer-participation and SSIs.

*Feeling the weight of the room (part 1)*

Volunteering in the Drop-in shifts between the welcoming and the bureaucratic; on the reception desk you greet visitors and more often than not this involves negotiating a language barrier whilst communicating in English. A practical demand made by my own position as someone who is mono-lingual.

I am sitting at the reception desk with Rezan - an asylum-seeker who has just started to volunteer at the Drop-in; she does a lot of the talking to visitors because she speaks both Kurdish and Arabic. We sit opposite the entrance of the main hall ready to catch those who come in; calling people over, asking them to sign-in and register their names, postcode, if they have children with them and if they have come with an emergency (like homelessness).

The morning advice session is drawing to a close; lunch plates are cleared up around us and we are sitting at the reception desk in anticipation that more people might come to join in the afternoon choir practice and the English classes. The tidal flow of people passing through means that there are pockets of time to chat: in our initial conversation I introduce myself and the research I'm conducting at the Drop-in and Rezan tells me that she has also studied for a PhD in economics. Our conversation is animated and I remember feeling that it was friendly and positive. Rezan spoke fluent English so issues of interpretation didn't disrupt the flow of our chat and we were able to share some of the common interests in our lives (mainly study).

If a third person were present, discreet and listening in, they might think we were speaking together as colleagues do - because after-all that is what we are. Pleasant small-talk whiles away the hum-drum moments of volunteering; in our conversation, I went on to ask: "do you like Manchester", Rezan answered, "I don't like Manchester, I prefer London". Rezan went onto say that she lived in London with her partner and as she spoke about her recent past the feeling-tone of the conversation shifted; her voice sounded more agitated, and she spoke more animatedly as the conversation shifted into a tensed revelation […]

The friendly conversational cues shifted into more of a monologue […] I sat facing her, giving her cues to know that I was listening, that I was receiving what she was saying actively. For a moment we were both ignoring the demands made by the reception desk to create an intimate encounter within the comings-and-goings of the main hall. Heard at the edges of our intimacy, the choir practice had already started: a group of people singing with and over each other in the messy polyphony that untrained singers generate. A refrain sung in another language.

When Rezan finished speaking I expressed sympathy for what had happened to her before she arrived in Manchester and then, I was called away by another volunteer who wanted to ask me something.

2.10

In this encounter, listening as a fellow volunteer involved a friendly conversation that transformed into something much more fraught. Thus raising the question: what did I tap into in this encounter? A textual analysis of this narrative will demonstrate how an informal listening process can be evoked on the page and this way of representing research encounters will feature in the forthcoming empirical chapters.

The narrative conveys the wider flow and movement of the space: people passing through the Drop-in giving it an undulating rhythm of different bodies and voices. Within these wider movements, myself and Rezan carved out a pocket of space in which the encounter unfolded. The use of the phrase tidal flow attempts to get to grips with the

shifting rhythms of the reception role. Using the '[…]' symbol in the narrative represents an emotional shift in the encounter that happened after the Manchester question. By focusing on the disjuncture in the conversation I am interested in highlighting the different feelings circulating in the interaction and the difficulties of giving voice to research participants.

Dialogic listening is a way of exploring the shifting ethical grounds of observer-participation because it emphasises how public spaces are created through listening and speaking. Listening as a researcher in such charged spaces is uncomfortable because the listener is implicated and entangled within the power dynamics of the research encounter. Dialogic listening complicates certain assumptions within active forms of listening that strive for an objective position of a neutral open attitude (Ayres, 2008), which means that listening is always more-than making the person aware that you are listening. In this sense, dialogical listening is a communicative performance that enlivens the struggles with the emotionally intense life and afterlife of what is felt and heard.

My understanding of Dialogic listening is also influenced by cultural discourse analysis (see Carbaugh 2007). In particular, Benjamin Bailey's (2004) interpretation of inter-group misunderstanding. As Benjamin states:

> 'by looking at misunderstanding in interactions across boundaries of apparent
> social difference (eg: race and culture) we can see some of the ways in which
> power, culture, and social identities are negotiated through talk and
> misunderstanding'.
> (2004: 396)

I am interested in how language and cultural difference are negotiated within everyday scenarios and the disjunctures, conflicts, and commonalities that are played out during these encounters. In the encounter with Rezan there is a disjuncture that appears through an emotional intensity that exists underneath the surface of the interaction. In the vignette I have presented here I have attempted to create an ambiguous mood to

convey that which presses upon the research encounter: what exactly was it that transformed the conversation? What did I fail to attune to in the encounter? Ambiguity is also employed around the specific details about what Rezan was speaking about when she became upset to anonymise the account and also to avoid straying into personal details that might betray confidentiality.

The narrative also reflects the dilemmas of the tripartite position of the researcher via the difficulty of negotiating friendships within research. In the vignette myself and Rezan establish a repartee through our initial chat, which then turns into a conversation about our PhD research; but the mood of the conversation shifts, as Rezan begins to narrate a traumatic story heard by the researcher as ear-witness. The narrative represents my attempts to grapple with the ethics and tensions of listening to others and how you have an affect on others and are yourself transformed by the encounter.

Through the use of this narrative I am advocating for a greater attunement to what constitutes intimate interactions.  Drawing on my experience as a researcher has brought greater clarity to my previous training as a social worker and represents an important stage in how I have come to listen as a researcher. The next part of this section will build upon this narrative by introducing how Dialogical listening works within informal  interviews and participatory-observation.

## 2.11

Dialogic listening can be developed through the method of participatory-observation (Kawulich 2005; Musante & DeWalt 2010; Spradley 1980). Another established method that features in my research design is the use of semi-structured interviews. Pink (2009) has written about how sensory approaches to research can offer a mixed-methods approach, where established methods are used alongside more experimental approaches. In the context of this sonic ethnography, the informal interview can be practiced as a multi-sensuous encounter; one that renders the semi-structured interviews: 'a social encounter - an event - that is inevitably both emplaced and productive of place. It has material and sensorial components' (Pink 2015: 74). Following Pink, this section will explore the interview as a sensuous, Dialogic listening

encounter. It will focus on conventional aspects such as the interview script and more sensual aspects of interview design, such as: the layout and feel of the interview environment.

As part of my sonic ethnography I undertook 17 semi-structured interviews across both organisations with volunteers; staff and refugee and asylum-seeker clients (some of who, were also volunteers). All participants signed a confidentiality agreement; the interviews were anonymised and everyone who agreed was fully briefed about what the interview would entail in their own language, and an interpreter was used when requested. As I did not have a budget, the interpreters were either friends of participants or when conducting interviews at the Advice Service, I was able to use their telephone interpretation service[13].

In addition, all formal research participants were given an introduction to the project prior to participation and then I called them 1 week after the event to ask if they still wanted to be involved. As I stated previously in the discussion on the slowness of the research process, I began my fieldwork in August 2017, but did not begin the interview process until January 2018. My intention was to establish a regular presence in both organisations in order to build up trust and good working relationships with participants. This reflects an ethnographic interviewing process in which 'researchers [attempt] to establish respectful, on-going relationships with their interviewees, including enough rapport for these to be a genuine exchange of views and enough time and openness in the interviews' [for participants] to explore their perceptions and meanings they place 'on events in their worlds' (Heyl, 2001: 367).

In designing the interview scripts my aim was to create sensitive and engaged process for interpretive and comparative analysis of participants perspectives (McIntosh & Morse 2015). The scripts reflect a descriptive/corrective and a descriptive/interpretive framework for conducting interviews, which enabled an empathetic approach that is

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[13] For a wider understanding of qualitative research methods (including interview techniques) within geographic research please see: Crang (2002, 2003); Davis & Dwyer (2007); Dowling, Lloyd & Suchet-Pearson 2016), Hitchings & Latham (2019); Latham (2008).

'particularly useful for research with more critical aims' (Blee & Tyler 2002). These frameworks were used because they aim to privilege the research participant as the 'knower' and are crucial for elucidating the 'divergent perspectives, attitudes, and experiences' of the participants; enabling a 'deeper insight' into the various ways that 'people negotiate the personal and social contexts' that shape their lives (McIntosh & Morse 2015: 3). Furthermore, in the design I developed two scripts - one for 'clients' and another for staff and volunteers. The rationale for this was to fine-tune each script to reflect the experiences and perceptions of the different participants. For example, in the staff/volunteers script I included a section on approaches to 'advice work' and another section about how they create empathetic encounters in their work. Both scripts shared a focus on the environment, or ambience of the organisations, and began with an open 'narrative' question: 'tell me about your first contact with the organisation?'

In the design of the scripts it was important to make sure that they weren't too rigid, and could be improvised to reflect what I knew about the person prior to the interview. The space to improvise within a flexible structure also made it easier to be responsive in the moment of the interview. Rarely did I go through each prompt or question step-by-step, instead I wanted the conversation to be open, to take unexpected de-tours; so I might be surprised by what the participant might go on to say. Researchers who adopt this approach find that respondents are more fully able to express themselves in response to unscheduled prompts (Berg 1989).

Dialogic listening is a central practice in both observer-participation and the interview process, and both of these established ethnographic practices should be understood as a phenomenological event. In the narrative vignette I described earlier, the encounter was enveloped within the wider everyday environment of the drop-in, whereas a more structured event such as a scheduled interview can be conducted in a space which is planned and therefore, potentially quieter and more confidential.

Pink (2015) states that the interview is much more than what is verbalised, or the 'hard' data that is gathered and analysed. Rather, it is a way of knowing generated through

an accumulation of sensory acts that surround and better enable the conversation, such as 'cups of tea and coffee, comfortable cushions, movement of performance, odours, textures, sounds and images' (2015: 80). Also, like in feeling the weight in the room, it can also be an uncomfortable encounter in which all the researcher's efforts to create a friendly space go awry.

When conducting interviews with refugees and asylum-seekers it is important to recognise the unequal power dynamics at play. The interview is a formal presence in a wide range of interactions within the asylum process, for example: appointments at the Advice Service are set-up as interviews, asylum-seekers have to attend interviews with the Home Office and researcher's typically use interviews as a qualitative technique. All these interviews have a different purpose, but the form of the interview carries baggage and it is therefore important to be reflexive regarding the position of the researcher in the interview process (see England 1994).

Although both organisations I worked with made substantial efforts to create a very different experience for refugees and asylum-seekers, the interactional format of the interview carries a powerful, affective charge and it would be naive to think that a more informal practice - such as those described by Pink (2015) - is a silver bullet. Writing specifically about the research interview, Liz Bondi states that '[…] interviews consciously and explicitly set up a division of labour in which one talks and another listens' (2003: 70). The division of labour in the interview is structured by a particular power dynamic in which the researcher (and usually citizen) asks the questions and the refugee and asylum-seeker respondents are obliged to answer.

To conclude this section I would like to focus on the document of the recorded interview and the process of listening back to the recording. Dialogic listening aims to explore face-to-face communication suffused with the wider environment, but as the researcher listens back to a recording of an interview, it is also interested in the manifold interferences of digital distortion and all the ticks, pulses and buzzes that populate the recording.

Advice workers at both the Drop-in and the Advice Service were happy for me to interview them but this was always within work hours. So although I recorded some engaged interviews, it meant that some of the workers had to keep their phones on them during the interview. A message tone; the vibration of a ringing phone amplified by a table and the digital rhythmic clicking that's present on some of the recordings are all minor noises, but they are a sign of things to be done and people to see.

Similar interferences occurred when interviewing people via an interpreter. The interpreter would join the conversation in a conference call and sometimes, if the interpreter had a deep enough voice it would rattle the plastic case of the phone. Meaning that you'd have to lean in or concentrate more on the object of the telephone rather than the person you were interviewing. Thus, breaking the receptive state of Dialogic listening. I have worked with interpreters who, when I called had been looking after children, so they would have to find a quiet space in their home in order to make the call. Introducing a layers of domestic sounds into the interaction; another layer of sound that makes it difficult to listen.

Focusing on incidental noise and interference places the research event in a wider affective soundscape, whilst raising the question: what is the significance of such incidental ambiences? If we are to take the interpreter call as an example; one salient point could be made about the different labour of listening. The Advice Service employs telephone interpreters on a job-by-job basis; they are not on a permanent contract and therefore, only get paid for the calls they provide interpreting for. The casual contracts of the interpreters adds another level of precarity to their position because it means that they might have to have other kinds of employment have to fit their interpretation work around other commitments such as child care. Most people can't afford or have the free time to just sit at home waiting for a call.

What is important to note here is that these encounters with interpreters reveal another labour of listening; one that may reveal a more precarious position than your own. The voices, the other domestic sounds, even the crackling interference of the phone line can be understood as a particular 'geography of the voice' (Kanngieser 2012) and the

sonic relations of audible citizenship. Another layer of possible interference, especially for the monolingual listener, happens when interpreters are used when no common language is spoken. Interpreting can aid Dialogic listening but it is also important to attune to the possibilities of disrupting within the encounter because interpretation is never a neutral activity. Working with interpreters and communicating across language barriers will be addressed in Chapter's 3 and 4. The next section will discuss the practical and ethical dilemmas of listening through an interpreter.

## 2.12

If a research interview couldn't be conducted in English then I would use an interpreter. At the Drop-in I would ask one of the volunteer interpreters if they could spare some time to take part in the interview and at the Advice Service I was able to use a trained interpreter. At the Drop-in, interpretation would take place face-to-face, and at the Advice Service it would be done via a conference call. Both these arrangements presented ethical dilemmas for listening to others through an interpreter.

Writing about the US Army's use of interpreters during the second invasion of Iraq, Moira Inghilleri states that the interpreter is 'socially and politically situated, actively participating in the production and reproduction of macro-discursive practices' (2006). Although the social and political situation of a war zone is very different from the everyday spaces of a refugee and asylum-seeker service, the notion that interpretation is never neutral is important to remember. As a multitude of social and political pressures can come to constitute how we listen to others via interpreters in more hospitable situations.

The interpreter plays a crucial role in my own monolingual Dialogical listening so it is important to be attuned to the distortions that may occur when a research participant speaks through another person. Sarah Craig and David Gramling (2017) outline some of the issues at stake during interpretation, including those that are *classificatory* - where an asylum-seeker may find it difficult to provide specific information about a subject. *Pragmatic* - for example: different cultures and languages have varying codes of civility and appropriateness and these are salient in language and may not be

translatable into English and *ideological* - for example: a Coptic Christian Arab speaker's claim could be intentionally or unintentionally, misinterpreted by a Muslim Arabic speaker, or vice-versa (2017: 85). Monolingual Dialogic listening opens up another dilemma that expands the face-to-face research encounter as the listening researcher has to be aware of the potential misunderstandings and communicative failures that may become part of the interaction. Therefore, it is essential that intimate encounters are analysed as part of a wider assemblage of actors and objects; from the interpreter babysitting and taking a call to the knackered phone that buzzes during a conference call.

To conclude this section I wanted to introduce a practical question: how does the monolingual researcher know when the research participant is mis/understood by an interpreter? When using a telephone interpreter at the Advice Service I would always address the person I was interviewing directly (this is common practice in the Advice Service). You have to suspend your disbelief when speaking through an interpreter to engage directly with the person in front of you. If you suspect that an answer doesn't reflect the question you asked, or if you notice a shift in body language or a change in the facial expression of the participant, these small signs may signal that some part of the conversation has been misunderstood. If this is the case, you would ask the person if they can understand the interpreter and repeat the question. If the participant is having trouble understanding the interpreter, you can politely end the call and dial another number for a different interpreter. Dialogic listening with an interpreter highlights the fraught inter-subjective nature of communication and how this is made more stilted by the monolingual researcher.

### Ambient listening

In the context of Deep listening, the practice of Ambient listening focuses attention on the wider ambiences and atmospheres in which communication unfolds. The practice of Ambient listening will be introduced in this section, but first, to give some shape to how Ambient listening can be practiced, I will re-introduce the narrative with Rezan.

*Feeling the weight of the room (part 2)*

Sitting together felt different. What had my question opened up? Sat in silence for what seemed an age and I have to say that I was relieved when another volunteer called me away. When I did return 15 minutes later, Rezan was no longer on the reception desk, she was in the advice office opposite the reception; there were a few people in the office with her and Rezan was crying and Penny, one of the advice workers, was trying to comfort her. I went in to the office to ask Rezan if she was okay and she tried to answer through her tears. She said that she'd become upset after I'd left because the choir had started to sing a Kurdish folk song, which had reminded her of her father who was back in Syria.

As the lunch plates were cleared and people passed though or lingered in the hope of catching the ear of an advice worker and as me and Rezan sat talking at the reception desk; the choir had started to practice. As we were talking, instruments were already being tuned and people were encouraged to take a seat in a circle.

When Rezan told me about the emotional impact of the song and what it brought flooding back, I couldn't help think that she was kindly shielding me from the real reason for her distress. Despite this thought, what this encounter brings to the surface is how the affective atmosphere of the Drop-in was transformed by the folk song and how hearing this song intensified our initial encounter in ways that we couldn't have predicted. Our friendly interaction veered off course to reveal how a shared act of listening in the wider sonic environment of the main hall positioned us differently and exposed an un-named trauma just under the surface of the interaction.

Another hypothetical visitor to the Drop-in from the Kurdish region of Syria may have had a positive response to the song and this would have reflected the aims of the choir. Through learning songs in different languages the choir is a place to share cultures and sing collectively and hopefully encourage a sense of belonging. Rezan's response is reminiscent of the previous discussion about the affects that can circulate around the sound of a police helicopter (Waldock 2016). The narrative demonstrates how the same sounds can evoke a sense of belonging, whilst simultaneously provoking traumatic memories in others to create overlapping ambient textures within the main hall.

Moreover, these ambiences coalesce and mingle but they also create uncomfortable affective barriers.

## 2.13

In this section I want to understand Ambient listening as multi-dimensional, where different layers of sound and encounter - from the intimate to the more public - form the soundscapes of each organisation. The Canadian composer, R. Murray Schafer (1994), broadly defines a soundscape as any 'field of acoustic study' (1994: 7), and the term has been influential within approaches to social and cultural geography addressing environmental sound and music (see Smith 2000; Revill 2016). Ambient listening involves attuning to the wider soundscape of the organisations and is a key part of the methodological framework for Deep listening. However, Shafer's concept of the soundscape is controversial, when he posits that 'the soundscape can reveal the 'sickness' or 'wellbeing' of a society. Where an ordered and harmonious soundscape reflects an ordered and harmonious society, a disordered and dissonant soundscape is revealing of social disorder and disharmony' (Thompson, 2017: 91). The concept Deep listening explored across this thesis attempts to challenge such a moralistic dichotomy to understanding listening. Therefore,Ambient listening is better understood in relation to geographic research that focuses on atmospheric methods.

Ben Anderson and James Ash write that the turn towards the concept of affective atmospheres has been a way to think about the diffuse, collective nature of affective life' (2015: 16). Rather than being an inert background to everyday events, 'atmospheres are forceful and affect' the ways in which we inhabit particular spaces and so 'precipitate particular structures of feeling' (Bissell 2010: 272, citing Williams 1977). In the narrative, the Kurdish folk song is part of an affective atmosphere that highlights the sometimes fraught, trans-national narratives of everyday life within refugee and asylum-seeker services. The emotions that were attached to the song are part of an 'affective economy' (Ahmed 2004)  that aligns people with particular communities whilst enabling or inhibiting our ability to act in the social world. What also comes to life in the encounter is the uncomfortable position of the researcher where my question - that is part of an ambience circulating with the folk song - renders Rezan as a vulnerable individual who then tells her traumatic story. A situation that upholds a

distinction between the ethnographer, who actively asks questions, and the respondent who is then obliged to answer. Alongside Dialogic listening, Ambient listening is a research method that is part of a wider approach to deep listening. A conceptual-methodological framework for listening that has wide ranging capacities within social research.

In particular, Ambient listening contributes to a wider call within sonic geographies for sonic methods such as the use of field recordings, sounds mapping and sound walks ( Butler 2006; Wood et al 2007; and Wilson 2016). In a similar approach to the design of my sonic ethnography, more experimental and sensory methods can be introduced alongside more traditional methods. Michael Gallagher and Jonathan Prior have written about the need for mixed methods approaches that include more 'listening, playback, recording, editing, distribution, broadcast, performance and installation' to extend efforts to fully comprehend the 'more-than-textual sonic world' (2013: 269). The three practices of listening represented here and the conceptual underpinning contribute to the development of multi-sensory methods within geographic research. Ambient listening offers an embodied way of being-in-the-world that requires 'us' as researchers, to interrogate our hold on intellective knowledge whilst opening up onto messy forms of knowledge where affect and the body can be understood as resources.

## 2.14

Alongside interviews, observer-participation and the listening diary, short audio recordings have been used as part of this sonic ethnography. The audio recordings were made to create documents of particular ambiences within each organisation. To record, I used a Zoom H2 portable recorder - a chunky, grey plastic object - that I always made visible when using in each organisation so it was obvious that I was using a device.

I did this to provide people with the opportunity to ask what I was doing, and I hope that my consistent presence in the organisation enabled me to build enough trust for people to come up to me and ask questions. This gave me the opportunity to provide explanations to those who approached me and made consent practical on the basis of

opting out (Simpson 2014: 37). However, as this is not a permanent ethical salve, it is important for all researchers using recording methods to adopt a situated, processual method open to listening to the possible concerns of participants. Such an approach could raise some uncomfortable truths about the legacies of the colonial gaze/ear in the academy which desires a knowledge of the other with a taken-for-granted right to that knowledge (Tuck & Wang: 2014).

In addition, when making recordings the position of the device is of central importance: I always aim to place the H2 in the corners of the space, or any other position away from people in an attempt to record the full sonic sweep of the room. What is recorded, to my ears at least, is a discordant polyphony of voices and other noises. However, I am aware that this is an ongoing issue that I have to return to throughout the process of my research, and it is only through experimenting with it in the field that I have worked through these uncomfortable realities, opening a space for ongoing active discussion about the dilemmas of recording atmospheric affects.

Before moving onto the next section, I would like you to listen to *Private Party*. This is an audio representation of a quiet moment of reflection that occurred within the advice office after the encounter described in the narrative. After you have listened, I will reflect on the nature of listening back to ambient recordings.

2.15
*Private Party* is a rough, fragmentary audio document of a time in which I was processing the lingering uncomfortable feelings of the encounter between myself and Rezan[14]. I was trying to write some initial impressions after finding a moment for reflection in the advice office. Although I am sitting alone and still, the noisy-social life of the Drop-in carries on around me. It is late spring; the window is open and so is the window in the kitchen, making the rooms even more porous. In a way, this porosity with the doors flung upon is another reminder of the mingling atmospheres present in de Hooch's (1658) *Courtyard in Delft* that was discussed at the end of the introduction to this thesis.

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[14] Please use the link to access audio: https://www.dropbox.com/home/BEN%20Sound%20Files

Listening back to *Private Party* you can hear volunteers in the kitchen singing 'happy birthday' to a friend. A familiar tune, but one that is sung in a different tongue to English, but the song doesn't quite reach the end and dissolves into conversation. The ambience represented on the recording is a mundane one that contains different feelings and tones. Including the lingering sense of uncomfortableness that was lingering with me since my encounter with Rezan and the shared celebratory mood of the kitchen.

*Private Party* represents the non-unified, shifting atmospheres of everyday life within the Drop-in, which emphasises that 'rather than a single, overarching, dominant atmosphere' a place can be 'constituted by many different atmospheres; ones that touch, make contact, merge, and rub-up against one another' (Anderson & Ash 2014: 39). Listening back to the recording prompts further reflection on my own tripartite research position and how this is modulated by the shifting atmospheres of the Drop-in.

What started as a supposedly light, initial interaction between two differently emplaced volunteers was then charged by a question and further transformed by the emotional weight of the Kurdish folk song. In turn, the song will have produced a multitude of different reactions that rippled across those who were singing and the others milling around the main hall.

Returning to Kapchan's (2016) notion of the 'sound body', it is possible to understand how my position as a researcher-volunteer is transformed by the sonic environment in which I am emplaced. The practice of Ambient listening draws the researcher's attention to how we affect and are affected by the paradox of listening; where the researcher is intensely present in the field, yet out-of-place as the one who overhears like the female figure looking/listening in the alley in Delft. The strange position of the listener is perhaps unveiled at the end of *Private Party* as the door to the advice office is opened and someone asks: "are you okay" and I say that "I was just listening". The quiet moment of reflection comes to an end with a strange admission: did I think I was being caught out, or exposed in the act of recording? Why was I just listening? Through

the tripartite identity of the researcher-volunteer-friend, listening works at the edges of your many public and private selves just as sound confounds any clear cut distinctions.

Finally, on reflection; ambiences have always been present in my own listening practice (professional or otherwise), although they have not been developed as an ethnographic 'skill' or as a way of learning to listen to the social world[15]. As a hospital social worker, the atmosphere of the hospital was always pressing on the more practical, empathetic interactions: the slightly woozy smell of disinfectant; the pulse and throb of the instruments attached to people's bodies; the voices of consultants; physiotherapists; nurses and those barely present voices of patients that struggled to be heard over the different monitors attached to their bodies. It is the ambience that weaves the subject into the wider social world in a way that is reminiscent of Berlant's notion that 'the weight of being in the world is being distributed into space, time, noise and other beings' (2011: 43). Ambient listening is a method of opening up a critical channel through which it is possible to explore how listening is constituted and fine-tuned. In the context of refugee and asylum-services it can be adopted to explore the varying intensities of encounter, the welcoming atmosphere that the organisations try to create and how the state's presence is felt within more intimate encounters. This will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5. However, the ambient will not be contained in this chapter alone; it suffuses this chapter and the wider sonic atmosphere of each organisation will make its presence felt in the other empirical chapter as well. The final section of this chapter will explore Layered listening; another form of sensual encounter that involves listening and the afterlife of the research encounter.

Layered listening

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[15] However, in a different yet interconnected sphere, listening to 'ambiences' is an integral part of my listening practice as a musician/artist and has slowly started to infiltrate my more academically focused work. This works both ways, as I have also worked on a Hörspiel (voice play) with the artists Tom White and a group of 7 singers, that began life as a series of interviews with care workers and has made use of more ethnographic techniques in a music/art context. The final presentation of this work is i've had it up to hear with fish & chips, which is a series of performances and an LP release on the label Calling Cards Publishing (forthcoming in December 2019).

Unlike Dialogic and Ambient practices, Layered listening is a desk based method. After the ethnographic fieldwork is over, Layered listening involves returning to and listening again to all the field recordings, interviews and auto-ethnographic reflections created during my time at both the Advice Service and the Drop-in. Participating in the life of both organisations was intense in different ways as they are both lively, social and noisy (to different degrees). It is recording and my own memories of these experiences that I will be returning to in the relative quiet of my desk at home or in the slightly less peaceful surroundings of my local library in Govanhill, Glasgow.

My desk, and the local library each have their own soundscape; as I write with the window ajar, I can hear my neighbour cleaning the communal close of the tenement and the thrum of traffic from Pollokshaws Road. In the relative stillness of this quiet time-space, Layered listening is a process of interpreting the voices of others and my own auto-ethnographic reflections into the incoherent whole of this thesis. Compared to Dialogic and Ambient listening, Layered listening seems relatively silent as it involves listening to texts and recordings rather than the lively sociality of an Advice Service or Drop-in. Also, Layered listening doesn't involve listening and speaking in real time with others so it is not directly intersubjective.

This position highlights a power dynamic of the researcher working with the voices of others to produce a single authored text; a shift in position that moves from the participant-researcher to researcher. The assembling of research in the writing process involves an ethical commitment of negotiating a critical position whilst understanding the limits of how you can work with the voices of others. For example: I retroactively sought Rezan's consent after I had finished my fieldwork after I began re-reading my listening diary where I had made a note of the encounter. As my own learning to listen as a researcher developed and I began to reflect upon the roles of Dialogic and Ambient listening the significance of the encounter became clearer. At this point, I called the Drop-in to speak with Rezan who gave me her permission to speak on her behalf. My actions reflect an ethical research practice that does not take my position for granted and it also demonstrates the shifting emotions and feelings that can be provoked as we listen back as researchers.

This chapter had developed three distinct, yet entangled practices of listening. Both Dialogic and Ambient listening are methods that focus on listening in the research field and Layered listening involves listening back and the interpretation of these practices on the page. The different stages that this process represents are a form of sound writing that aims to get to grips with the highly charged nature of listening within the noisy-social environments of refugee and asylum-seeker support services.

Layered listening is a compositional process that works from an understanding that listening is never neutral or transparent in an attempt to make it an uncomfortable challenge to access the voices of research participants. Even though the process of thesis writing is linear, an ethical approach that involves returning to the organisations for clarification demonstrates the ongoing struggle of working through the asymmetrical relationships of the research encounter. It is true that at this stage of the research process I am solely responsible for the writing, but this makes it even more important to listen and listen again in order to reflect upon the power and privilege of this position.

Conclusion

The opening chapters have developed Deep listening as a container for the conceptual and methodological framework for this thesis. In particular, this chapter stresses that Deep listening should be understood as a sonic ethnographic method that can be distilled into three distinct, but inter-elated practices. Dialogic listening focuses on what is said and heard within communicative encounters, whilst also exploring the 'geography of the voice' (Kanngieser 2012), in which acts of listening and speaking create public worlds and are immersed in wider structures and affective atmospheres. Ambient listening extends the affective economies of listening to further explore the multidimensional scales of the sonic environment; attuning to the rhythms; textures and echos that vibrate and undulate in the architecture of the everyday spaces of the Advice Service and the Drop-in. The third research practice is more reflective, involving the researcher listening again to the material collected and how re-visiting the research sites through personal reflection; audio recordings and interviews, calls for a desk

based Layered listening that grapples with the ethics of assembling the voices of others.

Deep listening has been developed as an embodied method of doing ethnography and this has been explored through the sound body of the tripartite identity of the researcher-volunteer-friend. Participating as a researcher and volunteer on a weekly basis meant that it was important to reflect on the shifting identity of the researcher and the ethics and politics of attunement that are required when conducting ethnographic research. In relation to the concerns of the previous chapter regarding Deep listening as an ethico-political act of citizenship, listening as a researcher involves attuning to the intersubjective nature of communication that takes any conflict that arises in such interactions seriously (see Bickford 1996). As the Rezan narrative demonstrates, listening across these different identities provokes certain conflicts that need to be negotiated and reflected upon in the process of learning and unlearning ways in which we listen across difference. There is an ethics to attunement in which the researcher should linger in the uncomfortable moments of encounter in order to grapple with the unequal power dynamics of research that cannot be glossed over through an assumption of friendship between the researcher and participants. Although such friendly relationships are important, it is essential for the researcher to understand the dilemma of the awkwardly emplaced researcher who shifts between the positions of being part of and yet distinct from the social field of research.

Across the three empirical chapters the conceptual-methodological framework of Deep listening will be used as a guide to explore the listening cultures of both the Advice Service and Drop-in. Each chapter focuses on different practices of listening that is part of everyday communicative encounters within each organisation. These chapters will focus on Empathetic, Bureaucratic and Ambient listening by engaging with how staff members, volunteers and refugee and asylum-seeker attendees at each organisation have reflected on how they listen to others and the sonic environments of their everyday interactions. The methods of listening that were discussed across this chapter were developed within fieldwork in order to understand the importance of listening within both the Advice Service and the Drop-in. Therefore, Dialogic, Ambient and

Layered listening are research practices that engage with how different actors understand and practice listening within each organisation.

The following chapters will explore how state structures imbue the everyday working patterns and encounters of both organisations and how people, however unwittingly, can come to listen like the state. The chapters will also explore how the listening cultures of the Advice Service and the Drop-in challenge the received norms of audibility to produce emergent counterpublics that challenge the debilitating, unequal power dynamics of the prevailing hostile environment. Listening to others in such noisy, vital, social spaces can be difficult, but it is by attuning to the muted or barely heard that future possibilities can be located that fundamentally challenge the 'us' versus 'them' attitudes that prevail in our society. It is through listening again that we can learn to listen otherwise.

Before the first empirical chapter on Empathetic listening is introduced there will be an interlude that creates a space in which you can practice listening rather than reading about listening on the page. To do so, the following interlude will feature one of Pauline Oliveros' (2005) 'Deep Listening Pieces' called *Ear Piece* (1998). There will be two moments of transition in which different pieces will be introduced as an interlude, which are intended to act as moments of reflective listening that engages the multidimensional notion of Deep listening that has been outlined in the first two chapters. Please take 5-10 minutes to listen with and through one of the questions presented in *Ear Piece* (1998) before moving onto the first empirical chapter.

Ear Piece (1998)

1) Are you listening now?

2) Are you listening to what you are now hearing?

3) Are you hearing while you listen?

4) Are you listening while you are hearing?

5) Do you remember the last sound you heard before this question?

6) What will you hear in the near future?

7) Can you hear now and also listen to your memory of an old sound?

8) What causes you to listen?

9) Do you hear yourself in your daily life?

10) Do you have healthy ears?

11) If you could hear any sound what would it be?

12) Are you listening to sounds now or just hearing them?

13) What sound is most meaningful to you?

(Oliveros 2005: 34)


Chapter 3
Empathetic Listening

*Empathetic Listening:*

Involves tuning-in to the feeling-tone of verbal and non-verbal communication, whilst demonstrating to your interlocutor (via cues and positive body language) that you are indeed listening. Showing empathy can demonstrate understanding and respect but it can also be smothering; especially if you think that you can simply step into the others shoes, experiencing their perspective of the world. If this is the case, then differences (such as: social, gender, class and racial) that exist between speakers can go unheard and can even be closed down.

## Introduction

In both organisations, Empathetic listening is understood to be an important practice within the caring labour of advice workers and volunteers. It was a common reference because it is part of the listening pedagogy of a diverse range of caring professions and this is an essential point of departure as a significant number of research participants have had training in professional caring work (eg: social work). To explore Empathetic listening, this chapter will concentrate on it as a practice of relationship building/repair and for its world-making capacities (see Berlant & Stewart 2019).

To begin, I would like to frame empathy as a professional 'skill' that is learned in a particular way by caring professionals such as social workers. Although both the Advice Service and the Drop-in operate outside a statutory social work framework, many of the paid workers and volunteers come from backgrounds such as psychotherapy or (like myself) social work. To further engage with my own learning to listen professionally I would like to return to a discussion of social work training. Here, Empathetic listening is framed as an important communicative skill because: 'service users value social workers perceived as warm, trustworthy, non-judgemental, and empathetic, who encourage them to tell their stories in their own terms, listening to them respectfully, as a necessary ingredient for change to occur' (Harris & White 2013: 112). Empathy is an ingredient in the professional communicative practice of a social worker as it projects personal 'warmth' and 'trust', but what is the expected change that occurs through these relationships? In this definition, the change envisaged is ambiguous; it could be about changing a particular individual's habits, or it could be a more structural change. This discussion raises an important question: is it a change shackled to the narrow horizons of a particular professional practice?

The professional 'caring' relationship encapsulated in the above definition appears to uphold a distinction between the caring professional and the cared for service user. It is

a paternalistic attitude that denies the so-called service-user a sense of agency in their own lives and falls back on the 'well-worn expectations and assumptions of rightful positions of care and what it means to give' (Darling 2011: 414). Moreover, if we again return to the previous chapters discussion of the dilemma of practicing social work within a wider climate of austerity in the UK, then how does a honed practice of Empathetic listening mitigate, for example, the social worker's role as a gatekeeper for ever diminishing social services? It is the contention of this chapter that this dilemma for caring practices (that which empathy is parcelled up with) is not just felt in statutory roles, as it is also negotiated in the Empathetic listening performed within the Advice Service and the Drop-in. This chapter will focus on how practices of Empathetic listening involve negotiating the intersubjective and affective dimensions of listening and the verbal and non-verbal misunderstandings generated when communicating across difference.

From a position of respect and solidarity with the participants and organisations who took part in this project, this chapter will engage critically with empathy. It will do so by developing the feminist ethnographic standpoint discussed in the previous chapter. From this perspective, it is important to understand that empathetic engagement is not an ethical salve; it is possible to over identify with the other or through a lack of reflection on how empathetic feelings circulate within a wider hostile environment and a draconian asylum regime that can maintain the barriers and not recognise structural differences that empathy is supposed to negotiate. Disagreement and uncomfortable connections are central to developing the forms of Empathetic listening that will be explored in this chapter.

However, difference and disagreement should not be understood as events or feelings that drive an irreconcilable wedge into the social fabric; such difficult moments of audition should be seen as part of the lively, contentious world-making and vital attachments that compose community and public spaces in each organisation. Community spaces are not ready-made, but are co-constituted and re-articulated by the actions of different subjects who contribute to the social life of a place such as the Drop-in whether they are 'citizens' or not. By engaging with the everyday sites of

encounter this chapter will explore ordinary forms of citizenship that challenge the norms of audibility defined by professional caring practices and the limited agency of refugees and asylum-seekers.

This chapter will begin by exploring the more formal face-to-face interactions of advice work across both the Drop-in and the Advice Service to explore the dilemmas of professional care work and the negotiation between words, deeds and feelings that such work involves. The middle section will focus on the communicative interactions between volunteers, friends and attendees of the Drop-in and the final section will explore the ethics and politics of interpretation. One of the main contentions that will be explored is that people listen across different registers, even within the same communicative engagement. With this in mind, the section on interpretation will be re-interpreted in the following chapter on Bureaucratic Listening. The first chapter will focus on listening to feelings within face-to-face encounters within both organisations.

## Listening to feelings is a luxury

### 3.1

In our interview, Salma - a long-term advice worker at the Drop-in - reflected on her listening whilst doing advice work, and in the process she articulated a maxim for listening that resonates across both organisations. Salma stated that…

> 'listening is not just in-and-out, sort their water bill, it might be something more and the client  might have built a trusting relationship with us to say that "actually, it's not going well with my husband"…and this is why we need to see beyond the practical'
> (DI Interview E).

Both organisations offer 'non-directive advice' to 'clients' and as Mark - the project manager at the Advice Service - states, this advice involves providing 'clients' with… 'options, attainable options, realistic options' and to 'think of ways to equip people to be enabled and empowered to deal with the [asylum] system' (AS Interview A). Non-

directive advice means that advice workers and volunteers need to ask the right questions but also listen and support 'clients' with options for what they could do based on what they say, without directing the client's course of action so that they can make their own decisions (see Craig et al 2011). Although both organisations differ in their respective focuses - the Drop-in will assist all refugees, asylum-seekers and other migrants, whereas the Advice Service has funding to assist asylum-seekers in need of accommodation and financial support - they both provide vital practical assistance. Therefore, as Salma states, this may involve  sorting out an issue with a 'water bill' and this means attending to what the person is saying whilst drawing on an understanding of a  legalistic or welfare framework in order to tackle the question.

In the extract, Salma appears to be grappling with a distinction between encounters that are practical/transactional and more meaningful empathetic ones. It is a difficult distinction to negotiate because in the context of advice work there is no clear distinction; as empathy is practical and the practical is empathetic. As Salma knows, tackling a problem that a person has with a 'water bill' can be an opening to another layer of interaction and connection. A practical, empathetic encounter is needed for building trusting relationships and gives the person you're speaking with the confidence to talk about other issues; like the fact that things aren't going well with a family member. Therefore,  Empathetic listening practice involves attuning to the emotional presences that may go unsaid and the affective structures that fine-tune a particular encounter. Thus, listening within face-to-face advice sessions involves the complex negotiation of words; deeds and feelings.

In an interview with Hannah - a regular volunteer at the Advice Service - she reflected on her practice of listening as an advice worker, saying: "you are listening with a certain agenda aren't you?" (AS Interview C). Hannah is a psychotherapist by profession and in our interview she contrasted the listening that she does as a volunteer with her professional work, which she described as more directly empathetic. In therapeutic terms, Empathetic listening involves getting to grips with another person's internal frame of reference and this can be a catalyst for further understanding between people (for a psychoanalytic context, see Carl Rogers 1951; Sullivan 2009 ). According to

Hannah, she found herself to be constrained in her listening because she had to negotiate listening with 'a certain agenda'; meaning that she listened to what the person was saying so she could practically assist whilst listening to the feeling-tone of the interaction. As many refugees and asylum-seekers attend the Drop-in and the Advice Service in a state of crisis - for example, they may be staying with friends who can no-longer accommodate them or are sleeping rough - they arrive at the organisation with a problem that needs sorting now.

Hannah reflects on the time-sensitive nature of her work as a volunteer that she sometimes felt as a less empathetic encounter because a 'quick fix' was in fact needed if a person or family are facing destitution and homelessness. In outlining this 'agenda' and the dilemma of listening empathetically, Hannah went on to say… 'it's more listening geared to facts really to be able to help […silence] we can listen to the feeling but that's luxury' (AS C). Although listening to feelings may appear to be a luxury within such time-sensitive appointments, what will become apparent in this section and across the chapter as a whole, is a dynamic process of listening to feelings: a 'sensuous embodied approach to listening that de-centres talk, without undermining it, knitting it into a mix of atmosphere, interaction, stuff, happening, context, sensations - and more besides - requiring attention' (Bennett et al 2015: 13). Such a practice of listening reflects the complex identities of advice workers and volunteers who have to listen across different registers such as the oscillation between Empathetic and Bureaucratic practices of listening.

## 3.2

As the reflections of Salma and Hannah indicate, Empathetic listening opens up the encounter to different layers of feeling and connection. Salma builds up trust with certain Drop-in attendees and this expands the relationship beyond the initial problem, as the person is understood with more worldly complexity. They may be a refugee who is new to life in the UK and therefore speaks little English and has trouble understanding a 'water bill', but they are also a complex human being with different desires, a family life and other joys and troubles. In the context of the UK asylum system, Bureaucratic listening is intimately related to more empathetic registers

because it structures the routine encounters of both organisations. For example: Salma has to listen and ask questions about the specifics of the problem with the 'water bill', but she wants to make the client feel comfortable in sharing anything else that might be more difficult to talk about. It is clear that the empathetic can be part of the bureaucratic, but this is not always the case.

The inter-relation between both listening registers and how people can (consciously or unconsciously) begin to listen like the state will be explored here and in the following chapter. This section will return to focus on the difficulties involved in learning to listen empathetically through a further engagement with Salma and Hannah's reflections.

The following extracts are drawn from interviews with both Salma and Hannah and a comparative reading of each highlights the difficulties of attuning to the energies and flow of a face-to-face advice sessions by confronting the possibility of empathetic failure as an inability to be in the moment of listening.

> Hannah: 'on the one hand part of me is physically there […] empathising in a flow if they are talking about their life circumstances but when I have to click in back to the advice role then I feel that this is definitely some kind of barrier [and] I become more stilted because I'm having to think rather than do something spontaneously. I need to think about what I need to do and process what is being said […]'.

> Salma: 'It's like we are a family [...] because we know a lot of things about the client, we know their life […] so when we see a client in, we bring to the office the first conversation is always [...] if we know their children: "how are the children?" "How's the new home you moved into last week?" "How's college?" Things like that... it breaks the barrier...the worker and the client. I always like to break that [...] because a lot of them they know me, they know I have children and they might ask me about my children…'
> (DI Interview E; AS Interview C)

In both extracts, Hannah and Salma refer to a communicative 'barrier'; for Hannah this is a barrier that snaps into place, disrupting the empathetic flow of an interaction, whilst for Salma, the barrier is broken through familiarity with the 'client' who is also part of the Drop-in's 'family'. In presenting these different perceptions of the barrier - one upheld another broken - I do not want to fall back on a lazy assumption that by empathising with someone you can eradicate the uneven power dynamics between the caring worker/volunteer and the cared for refugee/asylum-seeker 'client'. Instead, what I want to emphasise is the slow process of relationship building and learning to listen that defines both Hannah and Salma's different positions within the Advice Service and the Drop-in. Like myself, Hannah volunteers at the Advice Service for 1 day a week, and she has been doing this for 3 years (on and off). Whereas, Salma has been involved with the Drop-in for 15 years and she works 3 days a week. Therefore she has developed her practice over a longer period of time and has been able to build and maintain her relationships with the people she works with over time.

Hannah's comment is particularly insightful as it evokes a distinction between thinking/feeling that is reminiscent of Francisco Varela (et al's) term 'enaction'. The term 'enaction' was developed to 'emphasise the growing conviction that cognition is not the representation of a pre-given world by a pre-given mind but is rather the enactment of a world and a mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs' (Varela et al,1992: 9). Hannah describes an awkward being in the world that creates an empathetic barrier because she is self-conscious about her role. She is unable to think and feel in the moment like Salma because she lacks the necessary practice in doing so. Both Hannah and Salma are negotiating an embodied, everyday living that emphasises that empathy is not a 'natural' skill. It takes practice, and like any relationship  - including the familial - it includes conflict and sometimes a failure to connect. A perceived empathetic failure is articulated by Hannah due to her self-consciousness and such moments should be understood as an uncomfortable and necessary process of learning to listen across difference.

The need to learn how to be empathetic whilst doing is reminiscent of Cynthia Ward (1994) and Rosemarie Tong's (1997) understanding of a transformative empathy that

'explicitly resists essentialising gestures and is a profoundly politicised rather than a natural skill that requires struggle over and above passive recognition or advocacy' (cited in Hemmings 2012: 152). It is important to stress that interactions in both the Drop-in and the Advice Service are never static as they produce a knot of inter-related emotions that can be felt through a practice of listening to feelings. This expands notions of care beyond the formalistic professional relationship as it navigates the choppy terrains through frustrations; anger; resignation and the desire for a connection across difference that may not be reciprocated. Although a formal distinction between advice worker and the person who is in receipt of support is still intact in the above discussion these professional boundaries are not static. The following will explore these complicated knots of feeling in greater detail via a narrative vignette based on an advice session I observed; a privileged position I was able to adopt as a researcher with the consent of all the participants involved.

The story features Penny - who along with Salma is the other main advice worker at the Drop-in - and an anonymised 'client'. Instead of just focusing directly on what was said during this advice session, the narrative will attune to the wider environment in which the interaction unfolded in order to understand what affects people's ability to listen and how such practices emerge from such noisy-social settings.

## 3.3

"The central heating has gone", it was so cold in the main hall; it felt like it was the same temperature as it was outside and it was snowing outside. This meant that the main hall, which was usually the social hub, was off limits. So the Drop-in space had to be re-arranged; improvised around the pockets of warmth created by the numerous electric heaters.

For today, the main social space would be in the church building; with the food parcel service situated outside the administration office and English classes in the PC room. Luckily, the advice office off the main hall was small and easily heated, so the session I

observed with Penny and a young Sudanese woman who had recently been granted refugee status, could go ahead in the office.

Arriving by coach from Barnsley at 06:30am, the young woman had nowhere to live in Manchester and by chance, she had met someone in the centre of the city who was also from Sudan (via Belfast) and who knew about the Drop-in. Although Penny speaks Arabic, she had asked the man who brought the woman to the Drop-in to translate, and with his assistance the woman told her story. After the man's act of solidarity for a fellow refugee, he had now slid into the role of an informal interpreter…she had moved away from Barnsley as soon as she had received her refugee status because a stranger had shouted at her in the street and tried to pull off her hijab. As she was speaking, I observed Penny's facial expression change as she felt the weight of what she was told: a story of everyday racist harassment she was witnessing. In the notes I recorded after the observation I wrote…

> Inbetween what is felt, and what is actionable as a practicable response…
> (Fieldnotes DI 09/03/2018)

As a witness to the woman's story, Penny's physical reaction - her change in posture - registered the magnitude of what was said; a doubly voiced story in both Arabic and English. Throughout this exchange Penny's body language focused on the young woman; it was a quiet moment of reception that segued into a more obvious response when Penny picked up the phone. Her first call was to the local night shelter and her second to City of Sanctuary…Penny also asked the young woman if she had a 'police report'. This is an important piece of evidence because it might be key to getting the woman into housing quicker. But the woman said that she did not report the crime[16].

What is cruel about the woman's situation is that she has no right to housing in Manchester because you have to prove to the council that you have a 'connection to

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[16] City of Sanctuary is a charity that supports groups across the UK and Ireland to build a culture of welcome and hospitality towards refugees, asylum-seekers and anyone who needs it. It is a self-described grassroots movement built from the bottom up by communities that want to enact change.

the local area'; that you have lived in the area for 4-5 years. If not, the woman would become the responsibility of the local authority in Barnsley[17]. A small town that she couldn't wait to leave, but was now inextricably linked to…luckily, City of Sanctuary were able to find a temporary host for the woman, which would give Penny more time to find a more permanent solution.

At certain points, the interaction was punctuated by interruptions from Robert - a social work student - who needed some kind of form; he was followed by the volunteer, Memu who needed to ask Penny a question. The receptive moment in which the woman's story unfolded in relative quiet and focus was disturbed by the flows of people moving in-and-out of the office, which was far from a sanctuary separate from the bustling scenes and goings-on in the other parts of the building. As Penny was speaking on the phone the man who accompanied the women said to me that he was impressed that Penny could speak Arabic; he'd never met an English person who did so…at this point without missing a beat, Penny turned to us and said, in Arabic; "that's because I'm Libyan…[shared laughter]'… a moment that was slightly lost on me until Penny's quick comment was translated into English.

3.4

In the above vignette, Penny demonstrated her ability to empathise with the woman whilst getting things done. From my perspective, Penny appeared to be listening with her whole body, she was in the moment of the encounter; her body language demonstrating empathetic reception whilst she must have been thinking about how she can assist the woman with the practicalities of her situation. Feelings oscillating with deeds and words: did you report it to the police? What went unspoken was Penny's understanding of the difficulties of getting any sort of housing within Manchester because of the cruel rule of having to have a 'connection' to a place…the questions Penny asked resonate with Hannah's earlier assertion that you have to listen with an

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[17] Most British citizens (including refugees) can apply to be on the register for council housing and homeless accommodation but each council has local rules about who qualifies. Some of these local rules that exclude certain people from the housing register include: not having a connection to the area, rent arrears, anti-social behavior and those who can afford to rent or buy on the private market.

agenda, but this embodied thinking/feeling didn't appear to create a communicative barrier as it does with Hannah.

However, Penny did express some doubts about her ability to listen in such situations in our separate interview…

> Penny: 'I don't think that there's a opportunity to listen well, I think it's quite…superficial listening with, I don't think superficial is the right word…it is really difficult to do in-depth listening in this environment…'

> Ben: 'But you do manage?'

> Penny: 'Manage it to a degree, but I also think I, I dunno. Maybe I've got a rose tinted perspective of [the drop-in], but in my rose-tinted eyes it's a friendly…as crazy as it is, it's a friendly-crazy environment. There's quite a lot of love in the building'.
> (DI Interview A)

The extract resonates with Salma's understanding of the familial connections of the Drop-in whilst complicating that image: yes, there's a lot of love in the building, and it's a 'friendly-crazy' environment, but Penny still doesn't think there's a opportunity to listen well. Penny's comment recognises a particular paradox which is felt most keenly in the Drop-in. The social atmosphere is a unique and an essential part of how people experience the organisation, and according to Salma, this contributes to the 'familial' atmosphere that can challenge the unequal power dynamics between the caring and the cared for. Yet, the atmosphere is still a disturbance to the quieter, supposedly confidential moments of advice which are interrupted by different questions and bodies moving in-and-out of the office space. Creating moments of potential overhearing that could contradict the overall aims of the Drop-in as a safe space for refugees and asylum-seekers.

In contrast, encounters where one listens to feelings in the Advice Service emerge differently as similar appointments take place within designated office space. Here, there's less foot traffic, and no other events - such as the choir in the Drop-in - taking place that can potentially interrupt or overwhelm the advice session. However, as Hannah indicated, this doesn't necessarily make this an ideal listening environment, although it does seem more focused on first appearance. In the Advice Service the majority of the appointments are volunteer-led, meaning that although each volunteer follows a checklist of the different tasks that may need completing during the session volunteers may lack a certain confidence, especially if they only work on-and-off and only 1-day per week. This means that volunteers have to interrupt appointments to go and confirm certain queries, or ask a question to Mark, the project manager.

As a volunteer-researcher I know that I had to do this during the majority of the sessions I was involved in, and this can disrupt the communicative flow of the interaction. Concerns about the uncertain flow of an appointment at the Advice Service were also highlighted by other volunteers. In conversation with Adam - a volunteer at the Advice Service - after I had observed an appointment with him, I recorded in my diary that… 'Adam also spoke about his worries, in particular, the concerns of a volunteer who only ever comes in once a week (or less). The main worry is perception; does the client think you are competent if you have to keep asking for advice from Mark? Adam did say that on one occasion a client asked if they could speak directly to Mark' (AS Fieldnotes 11). Even though the office space presents more of an ideal one-to-one listening space, there are still these underlying emotions and interruptions that can disrupt the flow of an encounter. To conclude this section, I want to turn to some of the physical and material concerns that occasionally impose on listening in both organisations.

3.5

At one point during my fieldwork, it rained so much in Manchester that the roof of the Advice Service couldn't take the strain anymore; collapsing over the room where the computer servers were stored. This meant that access to the computer servers and

drives as well as the internet were restricted at certain times. This was a huge problem, slowing down the time-sensitive work of the Advice Service - not to mention the other projects - as we could not access any of the documents needed for appointments, the internet was just too agonisingly slow to conduct bits of ad hoc research. As mentioned in the above vignette from the Drop-in, the central heating occasionally stopped working; thus demonstrating that the fabric of the buildings were just giving up.

Such material conditions did have an impact on the day-to-day running of the service. Both the Drop-in and the Advice Service are based in buildings that they rent, and they are both buildings not designed for the proper functioning of each organisation. Even though the Drop-in and the Advice Service are integral parts of the refugee and asylum-seeker network of services in Manchester, they are both precariously funded and this is emphasised by the buildings they inhabit, which they have to adapt to their own purposes. A make-do attitude may be part of the atmosphere that Penny evokes in the above extract, but I don't think anyone would want to romanticise this position as there are some very real wider anxieties about the future of each project. Such material conditions impinge upon the face-to-face encounters as they can disturb the intimacies of encounter in which personal stories and traumas are articulated. Thus disrupting any familial or empathetic encounter as those taking part may not feel comfortable or safe if their isn't the quiet, confidential space to talk openly.

Overall, this section has focused on the listening practice of advice workers and volunteers in such a way that has upheld a distinction between the roles of those who care and those who are cared for. The next section will challenge this distinction via a focus on more informal interactions in the main hall of the Drop-in to discuss the wired energy of affective dissonance and the difficulties of empathising across cultural difference.

The Hand bag situation

This section focuses on an incident observed in the Drop-in's main hall. A space open to the public between 10:00 - 15:00 where people are free to come and go as they

please, helping themselves to tea and coffee; it is also where a free lunch is served, where various activities take place and there is also a shop selling second-hand clothes. The shop will be the focus of this section. But first, I want to introduce some reflections from Ghashia - a volunteer and friend of the organisation who first attended the Drop-in when she and her husband were granted refugee status.

In our interview, I asked Ghashia about what sounds she associated with the organisation, and in response Ghashia mentioned the 'choir' group and the general sound of 'chatting' (DI Interview B). During our conversation Ghashia made it clear that the social sounds of the Drop-in were important to her; she commented on the 'different languages; different communities […]' that can be heard in the Drop-in and that it is a place where people can 'share problems, share feelings with each other'. The activity of collective singing in the choir was also appreciated because… 'through singing people feel happy; feel one [and are] not strangers' (DI B). The choir is the same group that Rezan heard singing the Kurdish folk song in the previous chapter. The activity of collective singing could have been interpreted by Ghashia as positive because it creates a connection between people that is not immediately tied to language comprehension. Although Ghashia was keen to express the positive experiences she and others associate with the Drop-in, she also complicated this by saying that not all interactions and encounters are '100 per cent positive' (DI B).

From these comments it is clear that the Drop-in has a complex sonic environment. The choir can be heard as a collective activity where people from different countries and backgrounds come together to sing songs irrespective of whether they speak those languages. It is open to all and you don't need to be able to 'sing' to participate. Hearing a song sung in a language you are familiar with could fill a person with the positive feelings Ghashia expresses. If this were the case, then the choir would be contributing to a general 'welcoming' environment. However, certain songs like the Kurdish one, provoked a traumatic memory in Rezan because it reminded her of her family back in Syria. Moreover, the messy polyphony of a group of untrained singers learning a new song from scratch could be heard as a disruptive noise to those advice

workers and attendees who are trying to have a more intimate conversation (or anyone else for that matter).

The Drop-in has a complex sonic environment that exists in a state of tension as the main space is used for various different activities (such as choir practice and advice work) that mingle and clash. To explore this tension in more detail, this section will turn to another encounter that was not straightforwardly '100% per cent positive'. To do so, it will draw on a layered narrative sequence that focuses on the shop in the main hall to understand the powerful energy of affective dissonance.

3.6

The shop at the Drop-in sells second-hand clothes and is run by two Arabic speaking volunteers who only speak a small amount of English. The flashpoint central to this story was not something I witnessed first hand, so this event is necessarily pieced together from my questioning the Drop-in manager (who was present) and one of the main protagonists. The Drop-in manager informed me that the incident flared up between the shop volunteers and a regular female attendee who had become upset when she had put a 'deposit' down on a handbag at the shop, but the volunteers who ran the shop had gone onto sell the item before the woman could pick it up. The woman believed that she had been treated differently because she wasn't a 'Palestinian' like the volunteers, and this is why they did not save the bag for her (the volunteers are Arabic speakers, but they are not Palestinians).

This made the woman very upset and the incident quickly escalated into a confrontation with the woman shouting at the two shop volunteers and then shouting at Salma and the Drop-in manager. Although I didn't observe the argument at the shop, I was witness to the woman confronting the Drop-in manager, who was able to de-escalate the situation. Before the woman left, the Drop-in manager told her that her aggressive behaviour wasn't appropriate, but despite this, the woman was still always welcome to attend the Drop-in.

The choreography of the incident had played out across the floor of the main hall; starting at the shop and then in front of the kitchen and the tea and coffee table. The conversation between the manager and the woman took place in the passage that links the main hall with the outside door; this was a private conversation and again, not an interaction I observed first-hand, but something I spoke with the manager about the following week. I also spoke with the woman involved in the hand bag situation: she no longer appeared angry about what happened; she said that she had given one of the volunteers a £1 deposit to save the bag for her, and that she would collect it when she returned from the PC room. The woman became incensed by the re-selling of the bag because she thought that the volunteers had made the sale to someone who spoke the same language as them: an Arabic speaking someone who wasn't African (the woman is from Nigeria). The woman spoke English in a fluent, strong accent and told me in no uncertain terms that in an African market, 'no-one would take this shit'…

3.7

Re-told above, the hand bag incident highlights the unpredictable events and affective dissonances that can punctuate the main hall. Through my conversations with the manager and the woman involved in the incident, it became clear that the coalescence of anger was produced through an empathetic and communicative failure as the people involved did not share a common language and this led the Nigerian woman, to feeling that her request had been ignored. Usually, in such everyday trans-national encounters English would be a lingua-franca, but the Nigerian woman and the Arabic speaking volunteers had very different levels of English.

The incident resonates with Benjamin Bailey's notion of communicative misunderstandings, that such incidents 'take place in cultural and socio-historical contexts that are never neutral or natural, and they reflect and reproduce a world that includes conflict, ambiguity and uncertainty' (2004: 410). It is important to stress here that - like Ghashia, Penny and Salma articulate - the Drop-in is a hospitable and caring place for refugees and asylum-seekers, but it is not always harmonious. Resulting in moments of affective dissonance that in this instance culminated in the accusations levelled at the shop volunteers.

Present in the interaction between the women and the shop volunteers is a communicative failure that uncovered the feelings of the woman who assumed that there was a particular hierarchy at work in the Drop-in and that she was discriminated against for not speaking Arabic. The incident demonstrates the limits of empathy as not everyone who attends the Drop-in is involved in the intimate face-to-face encounters that Salma described in the 'listening to feelings' section of this chapter. If this was the case, then the Nigerian woman's assumptions might have been discussed and dealt with in a more personal encounter. Taking all this into account: the incident could be described as a failure of attunement between the Nigerian woman and the volunteers and a further failure on behalf of the Drop-in in their awareness of the potential hierarchies that structures social spaces.

The angry outburst is representative of the uneven power dynamics articulated between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' within the community of the Drop-in. For the Nigerian woman, hearing the Arabic language spoken in the Drop-in could have been associated with a knot of emotions that produced a sense of 'insider' privilege she felt that she was excluded from. This echos Hester Parr's research into semi-institutional spaces (such as a drop-in), when she states that: 'there are instances/processes of boundary formation and exclusions of 'otherness' that actually occur within 'other' groups (2000: 233). The hand bag situation exposes a complicated knot of feelings around Ghashia's positive associations related to the sound of 'chatting' and the 'different languages; different cultures'; producing a social tension that bubbled to the surface in the hand bag narrative.

The wider significance of this misunderstanding recalls Sara Ahmed's (2004) conception of 'the cultural politics of emotion'. Ahmed writes that: 'how we feel about others is what aligns us with the collective, which paradoxically 'takes shape' only as an affect of such an alignment. It is through how others impress upon us that the skin of the collective begins to take shape' (2004: 54). A failure to connect reveals the complex feelings that compose the social space in the Drop-in; the skin of which is a complex, inter-woven patch-work of things and feelings that has to be constantly re-negotiated.

The patchwork-like structure is important in understanding such a micro-conflict as it provides some insight into the diverse subject positions articulated in a community space like the Drop-in. It also raises some important questions: what do the disruptive energies of affective dissonance produce? Did this interaction confirm the Nigerian woman's suspicions, further entrenching her perspective of the privileged position of the shop volunteers?

### 3.8

As is evident from the narrative above, the woman did return to the Drop-in; her reappearance was hopefully a positive response to the cautionary, but not exclusionary conversation she had with the Drop-in manager the week previously. Also, reflecting on some of my time spent volunteering on the reception desk in the main hall, I recorded another encounter between the woman and the shop volunteers…

> 'There was a lot of personal joy in the atmosphere of the drop-in - or, this was how I was affected by it. One reason for this was […] seeing the woman […] go over and greet [the shop volunteer], who she had previously argued with over the hand bag. The woman went over and gave her a hug and because they don't share a language - English and Arabic respectively - this bodily contact looked to be warm and quite profound. It was this little moment, not much, that shows how tension/conflict is navigated within the        drop-in. Later, when I was at the shop, [the volunteer]  gave the Nigerian woman a towel on the house…'
> (Fieldnotes DI 07/12/2017)

In this extract I recorded the personal joy I felt as a response to observing the two women embrace each other; as I reflect back on my reaction to this observed encounter now, I think that I had a strong reaction because the two women resolved the issue on their own terms. Although the Drop-in manager intervened, she did not tell the woman to apologise (her abuse of the others wasn't justified, but in some ways her anger at the re-selling of the hand bag was understandable), but the woman obviously felt this was necessary. To come back to any organisation, especially if you might

assume that you've upset a regular volunteer, who has been trusted to run a small shop and therefore is possibly good friends with everyone including the staff, is a small, but courageous act. More importantly, it demonstrates the importance of the multiple layers of listening that occurred after the incident. First, the Drop-in manager's quiet interaction with the woman must have been effective in communicating that the woman had flouted the safe space policies of the organisation, but this did not mean that she was excluded from the Drop-in.

A second significant act is what went unsaid in the hug; a moment of repair across the linguistic and cultural boundaries that precipitated the misunderstanding. This minor act of recognition can be understood through Hannah Macpherson's et al notion of 'whole body listening' - and although I am taking this out of the context of Macpherson's el al participatory research with artist's with physical and learning disabilities - it is useful to recognise the 'total communication and response (gestural, material and embodied), which understands it will generate (rather than just uncover) ideas and which understands the subject who is being listened to as always in process' (2016: 383)[18]. Such an understanding recognises that communication is about more-than the medium of words, and is an embodied collective performance 'founded on an affective dynamic for which both the speaker and the listener are responsible' (Hirshkind 2007: 23).

3.9

The story of the handbag explores the ethical and political capacities of relating to others in a way that challenges the pre-defined positions of the caring and the cared for. It does so by highlighting the power dynamics and hierarchies that structure everyday experiences in the Drop-in; distinctions that were felt by the Nigerian woman who felt discriminated against in the narrative. The different stages of the incident and the intervention from the Drop-in manager demonstrate how to deal empathetically with

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[18] This paper develops an expanded concept of listening as a practice of 'being-with' in the context of visual arts activities with people with learning disabilities. In the paper, art materials and activities are described as 'meeting points' that enable a non-verbal conversation where the 'inclusive artist' listens in a way that is attentive to visual, verbal, gestural and atmospheric stimulus. In short, listening is not simply a matter of aurality, but a whole body, somatic form of communication.

such intense events in a way that is sensitive not to exclude potentially vulnerable people.

The incident also highlights the complex agencies of the different actors in the Drop-in: the people who attend and volunteer speak a diverse range of languages; have different cultural and class backgrounds, and negotiate the everyday power dynamics in a way that challenges the distinction between the active citizen worker/volunteer and the passive refugee/asylum-seeker. In the extract volunteer-refugees are tasked with running the shop and the Nigerian woman uses her own initiative when coming back to the Drop-in to repair her relationship with the shop volunteer. These agencies reflect Les Back's (2003) notion of the importance of everyday forms of co-existence that were discussed in the Deep listening chapter in relation to the everyday sites and scales of a micro-politics of listening. It also resonates with Kye Askin's concept of a 'quiet politics of belonging' in the sense that a (micro) politics involves the 'making of relationships between people' that is open to the potential of disagreement (2015: 475). Minor moments are connected to larger structures and patterns as they give a sense of how pre-determined structures are challenged. What will be discussed in the conclusion to this chapter is how such minor moments can be harnessed and feedback into the organisations and beyond. What can we learn from these incidents and how can change be enacted?

Within this 'quiet politics', Empathetic listening is an important practice on different levels: firstly, by listening to the Nigerian woman's reasoning the Drop-in manager was able to understand the deeper belief about the possible discrimination and the perceived hierarchies between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Also, the failure to relate between the Nigerian woman and the shop volunteers demonstrates that the relationships that are part of the Drop-in's (loose) community are in progress and not always harmonious. Moreover, part of articulating this community involves dealing with the affective dissonances and the feelings of anger and frustration that are part of negotiating shared spaces.

Lastly, I would argue that this is part of a micro-politics of listening because potential conflicts and affective barriers are negotiated and the results of these intersubjective encounters may require change from some participants. Perhaps the Nigerian woman was right, and a hierarchy between the refugee and asylum-seeker attendees and those who volunteer does exist (however unconscious this may be). If this is the case, then the Drop-in needs to listen empathetically to these concerns and then take action to enact a change that will tackle these disparities. Such reflective action would involve challenging the norms of audibility of the Drop-in to listen to the marginalised voices in an 'attempt to create a shared responsibility towards changing the roles of speakers to listeners and to demand to be heard on different terms' (Bassel 2017: 8). Such actions are important as they draw out the dissonances of co-existance and the different levels of agency that contribute to the building of relationships within these spaces.

Also, the important act of making the Nigerian woman still feel welcome at the Drop-in demonstrates that such dissonances can play out and be resolved, whilst not excluding potentially vulnerable people. An especially important negotiation within a wider hostile environment where it is difficult for refugee and asylum-seekers to find social spaces and a connection to a wider network of people in their local area. The next section will continue with an analysis of Empathetic listening by focussing on the ethics and politics of interpretation.

## You are only the mouth (part 1)

This section will focus on the ethics and politics of interpretation as it occurs within informal, conversational encounters and in the felt dynamics of an interpreted conversation. It will do so by comparing the use of interpretation in both the Drop-in and the Advice Service. The focus on interpretation is split over 2 different sections; the second of which will feature in the chapter on Bureaucratic listening. Interpretation is essential to both these registers of listening and whilst this chapter will concentrate on informal encounters, the next section on interpretation will focus on the technologies of interpretation.

Even though the Drop-in has volunteers and advice workers that are multi-lingual - Penny speaks English and Arabic and Salma speaks 4 different languages including French and Tigrinya - interpreters are needed for the monolingual staff and sometimes, the multi-lingual staff use them to convey the nuance of what they might be talking about. The volunteers and workers at the Advice Service are more mono-lingual and are therefore much more reliant on interpreters in their work.

The Drop-in uses informal, volunteer interpreters who are given an induction into their role and they have to sign a confidentiality agreement. The Advice Service is part of a larger national NGO, so even though it runs on 2-years funding - it still has the financial resources to adopt a more professional interpretation system. In which all the interpreters are informally employed - earning money per interpretation, rather than having permanent contracts - and they have to go through a more stringent training process. Usually, interpretation at the Drop-in is done face-to-face, whereas at the Advice Service the interpreter will join the appointment via conference call.

3.10

Salma is a skilled interpreter and as well as working at the Drop-in, she is also on the roster of interpreters at the Advice Service. By observing her work, and through our conversations, I was able to gain some valuable insight into her approach to interpretation. In our interview, I asked Salma, what makes a good interpreter? and she said…

> "A good interpreter is to have good memory and listen, not jump to conclusion and at the end of the day you are only [...] I am a person yes, but you are only the mouth, the language for that person" (DI E).

In her insightful response, Salma emphasises the importance of attuning to what the person you are interpreting on behalf of is saying and not working from any presumptions you may have about that individual, or what they might be trying to communicate. Salma's definition resonates with Back's notion of Deep listening that was explored earlier in the first chapter, which involves trying to listen to what is said

and heard without any pre-conceptions of the speaker. The main difference here is that Salma does not advocate a critical role to the interpreter. Instead, Salma likens interpretation to a technology - she is only the mouth; using a metonym of the speaking apparatus connotes a sense of neutrality that is readily associated with technology. Yet, she hesitates, at the end of the day you are only… Salma recognises that she is a person: intimating that interpretation is a complicated process of articulation; something that is far from the harmless activity we might associate with the false sense of accuracy and transparency we may have when using a program like Google Translate. Instead of a neutral technology, Salma's hesitation reveals that the interpreter does have a role that can shape the meaning of what is said; yes, she is only the mouth, but her mouth is a different speaking apparatus, with a tonal quality, texture and accent that differs from the non-English speaker she is interpreting for.

Salma's understanding of her role resonates with Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi's understanding that literary translation - like the act of verbal interpretation - is 'not an innocent, transparent activity but is highly charged with significance at every stage: it rarely, if ever, involves a relationship of equality between texts, authors and system' (1999: 2). This sentiment is echoed by Moira Inghilleri's analysis the interpreters role with the UK asylum system; she writes that 'interpreters can actively shape, and can even come to dominate, the participant framework of the social/interactional space [of interpretation] through the recasting and/or omission of utterances (2005: 75). The agency of the interpreter is important in shaping the interaction as they have a role in the production and reproduction of micro and macro-discursive practices (see Inghilleri 2006). What is important to stress is that interpretation is never a neutral process and even when interpretation happens outside the formal asylum process (for example: the formal process includes interviews that asylum-seekers have with the Home Office), how interpretation modulates the encounter needs to be considered. To explore interpretation in more detail, this section will focus on the moments of communication breakdown within both organisations.

To begin this discussion I will focus on an interview I did with Lucie and a French interpreter. Lucie was a 'client' of the Advice Service who assisted her with a Section

95 application. About this period in her life, Lucie said: "I was desperate [...] regarding my situation, I was down, but look at me today I am very happy" (AS Interview C). I don't want to dwell on Lucie's difficulties here, nor will the focus be on the ins-and-outs of Section 95 (an overview of asylum-seeker support featured in the introduction to this thesis). Alternatively, this section will begin with the uncomfortable feelings I had after the interview and will draw on the method of Layered listening to reflect upon the process of listening back to and transcribing the interview with Lucie.

## 3.11

Before listening back to the interview with Lucie, I remember that my initial feelings about how the interview went were that we hadn't 'connected'. As Hannah described earlier with regards to listening as an advice worker; a communicative 'barrier' snapped into place, redoubling when I had to ask, revise and ask questions again and again. A process that made the interaction awkward and made me doubt my ability to improvise with my interview script in the moment of the interview.

As the interview unfolded, and the questions didn't 'land' as I hoped they would; I remembered that Lucie laughed on occasion. A non-verbal response that was not interpreted…was Lucie's laughter a sign of her professed happiness? Or was it a sign of an untranslatable nervous energy that was contagious between us? Dwelling on this feeling made me apprehensive to put on my headphones and listen back to the recording…

…when I did listen back to the interview, I heard myself asking the question: 'what is it about the Advice Service that makes you think it's a place that cares about refugees? [verbal silence…the interpreter lost in the static of the call…]' and into this silence Lucie said, "hello"…

Silence always feels as though it goes on for longer than it actually does and this was no exception. After a brief moment the interpreter voiced Lucie's response; "that happened when I did my application [for Section 95], they took care of me until I had my result" (AS C). The interpreter used a mobile telephone throughout the call and the

line was intermittent, but we persevered with the call. I asked another question; listening back, the distortion on the line makes the interpreter's voice sound as through it has drifted off into the ether; they sound as though they are addressing another person in another room somewhere else. At this point, me and Lucie both say "hello", I then ask the question again, and the interpreter says "hello"; a response which confirms that the interpreter was having difficulty hearing. I try again […the line is dead] me and Lucie both laugh this time [dial tone…] I say to Lucie in English: "[they] must not want to speak to us", and she says "yes!", and we both laugh awkwardly (AS C).

3.12

In a moment of audibility, Lucie stated that having interpreters "is very important because I don't speak the language so it is very important for someone to translate what I am saying" (AS C). In a more monoglot project such as the Advice Service, interpretation is indispensable for active listening and understanding what the person is saying in order to get to the bottom of the issue. However, it is still important to understand the emotional energies and non-verbal elements of an interaction - including laughter. Writing about the ethics of laughter beyond humour and his ethnographic work in a care home for the elderly, Phil Emmerson states that 'laughter is imbued with productive or creative force which interacts with other forces (material, social, affective) to produce particular power relations (2017: 2093). Focussing on how my own emotional response developed during and after the interaction with Lucie highlights the complex emotional dynamics of the interview encounter. At first, Lucie's laughter was interpreted as a nervousness that was contagious; I too felt nervous, like I was losing control over the narrative of the interview and this exposed the pre-defined power relations of the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. I was the one speaking and demanding an answer from my subject who then had to narrate her interpretation of the asylum-seeker narrative. A narrative in which Lucie was the passive victim of a harsh asylum regime - Lucie said: I was desperate - and then assisted by the Advice Service. It was laughter that brought these tensions to the surface, but the second moment of laughter is shared between us where we were both seemingly revelling in this necessary loss of control. Thus, demonstrating the unpredictable dynamics of being-with others.

The interview with Lucie also highlights the messy nature of listening across difference through an interpreter. This is especially resonant when the wider sonic environment is considered, rendering the encounter as an assemblage of human voices; static drift; a tinny speaker phone and nervous emotional energy. All this mingles together to modulate the transmission of the voice in ways that matter. The ambience of the interaction charges the encounter and reveals how each of us is differently positioned within the interview. Despite these difficulties, I am not attempting to make a bad/good comparison between telephone and face-to-face interpretation. Rather, this section aims to explore how different practices of interpretation emerge across the two organisations. I will now turn to reflect on a narrative vignette from the Drop-in to discuss the conflicts of informal face-to-face interpretation.

### 3.13

One afternoon in the Drop-in I was chatting with  Ghashia near the shop when Mohammed - a regular attendee  - joined our conversation. In my listening diary I recorded that…

> 'it was very difficult to communicate with [him] at first, we had a conversation just the two of us in broken English. I think he was telling me about his dissatisfaction with both the Home Office and the police, both who he described as "stupid"'.
> (LD 10)

Mohammed has been living in Manchester for a long time and the Home Office had refused his asylum application. When he told me that he wanted to return 'home', I interpreted this as he wanted more practical assistance and the conversation shifted into a more formal dialogue. I called Memu over - a Kurdish volunteer who regularly interprets for people in the Drop-in. I asked Memu to explain that if Mohammed was sure about wanting to return 'home' and leave the UK, the Home Office could assist him through the 'Voluntary Returns' program[19]. Mohammed would also be eligible for

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[19]The Home Office will assist migrants in the UK who make an application to return to their 'home' country. This process is called 'Voluntary Return'.

Section 4 financial and accommodation support whilst he was waiting to have his application for assisted return processed by the Home Office. Ending a long period of homelessness as he relies on the support of a local night shelter[20].

In the listening diary, I recorded an observation about how we were stood during this conversation: 'we were standing quite close together; as Mohammed was talking he was very expressive with his hands and face - one gesture he was doing was simulating choking' (LD 10). When Memu interpreted, he said that Mohammed told him how 'he cannot breathe in this country' and that he wanted to return to 'Palestine' (LD 10). After the conversation was over, I continued to speak with Memu; he said that he… 'didn't like it when people lied'. He was suspicious of Mohammed's assertion that he was Palestinian because, according to Memu, he didn't sound Palestinian; he thought that his accent was more Egyptian. Also, when both men were speaking, Memu said that Mohammed slipped between talking about Egypt and Palestine (LD10). Such a fluid accent and accompanying ambiguous national status is understandable because Mohammed said he was originally from a border region of Palestine/Egypt and that traditionally, his family had been 'shepherds'[21].

This story demonstrates that the Home Office's Voluntary Returns scheme is anything but voluntary. As an asylum-seeker who has had his claim 'refused' by the Home Office, Mohammed was no longer entitled to state support; a policy that forces people into poverty and with no other options apart from homelessness or schemes such as Voluntary Return. A number of studies have suggested that the Home Office uses destitution to drive 'refused' asylum-seekers out of the UK, forcing such individuals to make stark choices between 'voluntarily' returning home or homelessness within the UK (see Darling 2009; Dwyer & Brown 2005; Refugee Action 2018). It is also important to point towards another important aspect in this interaction; the interpreter, Memu,

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[20] The Home Office provides Section 4 support to people who have had their asylum-claims 'refused' by the state and they meet one or more of the following criteria: that they are taking reasonable steps to leave the UK; that they're unable to leave because of a medical condition; because there is no viable route to return to their 'home' country; that they have been granted a judicial review and are waiting for this to proceed; or that the provision of accommodation is needed to avoid a breech of human rights.

[21] After the 1914-1918 war, Palestine was under the control of Britain and the Egypt/Palestine border was enforced to control the local Bedouin population (see Kliot 1995). It is possible that via his reference to his family being shepherds, that Mohammad is referring to this particular history of bordering.

does not adhere to the 'objective' stance that Salma emphasises at the beginning of this chapter. Memu is not just the vocal apparatus representing what is said by Mohammad as he also voices his own suspicions about Mohammed's story and thus, charges the encounter with a 'culture of disbelief' that is usually associated with the Home Office. Listening to and interpreting Mohammad's story, Memu is suspicious of what he is saying based on his knowledge of Arabic and the language's regional variations. An insight that reveals itself as an empathetic barrier between the two where Memu's response shows how you can come to listen like the state.

3.14

On hearing Mohammad's story, Memu is not filled with feelings of sympathy or solidarity (Memu is himself a refugee from Syria). Instead, what is produced is a sense of mistrust. This encounter demonstrates the complex ethics and politics that are negotiated in the Drop-in, which in this instance as a monoglot listener, I was unable to grasp first hand. The encounter resonates with the issues outlined by Sarah Craig and David Gramling (2017) regarding some of the deeper issues at stake during interpretation that were discusses in the research design chapter. In the encounter, Memu's interpretation reveals that his listening is structured by issues that are classificatory - as he questions the origin of his interlocutors speech, and ideological - as he is weary of people who don't tell the truth and is therefore suspicious of Mohammad's character (see Craig & Gramling 2017: 85). The empathetic failure represented here points to further cultural differences that demonstrate how Memu's listening response reflects received structures (Bailey 2007). Moreover, it is shaped by the norms of audibility in which some asylum-seeker voices are deemed to be more legitimate than others because they tell the 'truth' about their stories. The interaction between Mohammad and Memu demonstrates how the debilitating logic of the hostile environment suffuses ordinary encounters within the Drop-in.

The interaction between Memu and Mohammed also addresses a more general point about Arabic, as Judith Rosenhouse (2017) writes: speakers of Arabic are often multi-dialectical, so alongside features that are shared with neighbouring dialects, there are new features from prestigious Koiné-type forms (a common variation often derived from

an urban dialect) and loan words from contemporary contact languages. Therefore, it is important to consider the fluidity of Mohammad's dialect (see also Matras 2018). Yes, he may not sound Palestinian, but his accent could be influenced by Egyptian variations and this will be further transmuted by the journey he has been on as a refugee.

In his work Conflicted Phonemes, the artist and audio investigator Lawrence Abu Hamden worked with a group of Somali refugees, linguists and activists in Utrecht, Netherlands, to discuss ways of countering the controversial use of Language Analysis in determining the origin of asylum-seekers and unjustly denying legitimate cases of asylum. Somali asylum-seekers who had their cases refused by the Dutch authorities had their language analysed and were deemed to come from a small territory in the North of Somalia that was understood by the state to be safe enough not to grant refugee protection. What Conflicted Phonemes seeks to expose is the socio-political assumptions that are replicated by these technologies. Abu Hamden's participatory work resulted in a set of 'non-geographic' maps that 'explore the hybrid nature of accent, complicating its relation to one's place of birth by also considering the social conditions and cultural exchange of those living such itinerant lives' (Hamdan 2019).

An itinerant life is reflected in Mohammed's story, in which he told a narrative of someone travelling from an Arabic speaking border community of shepherd's who had then travelled across numerous state borders, eventually arriving in Manchester. Although Hamdan's project focuses on a particular Somali language community, the evidence put forward by Conflicted Phonemes further suggests the slipperiness of language and the importance of attuning to the social and cultural conditions that impress upon communication. Bringing this section back to Empathetic listening, it is essential that empathy is understood through its frictions and dissonances and as a skill that is learned through doing. It is not something natural and people need to be aware of how it works and the power dynamics that can structure how we relate to others. The following conclusion will provide an overview of the main points addressed in this chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter began by exploring Empathetic listening as a skill that is learned through doing advice work and how this may be influenced by the pedagogy of professional caring practices. As someone who has trained as a social worker I am interested in how practices of 'active listening' inform professional caring work and how the transformative potential of such practices is limited within the narrow horizon of a professional practice.

It is my contention that professional practices of 'active listening' (that includes the capacity to empathise) are often limited to a narrow focus on what is said and heard and that a more dynamic process of listening to feelings expands our understanding of how we can listen *deeply* across difference. An embodied approach to Deep listening is attuned to what is said and heard, but it knits communicative interaction into a mix of atmospheres, architecture and stuff (Bennett et al 2015). Expanding listening in such a way is important because it requires the listener to attune to the 'affective economies' (Ahmed 2004) that imbue everyday encounters and can re-produce certain norms of audibility.

In the previous section, the focus on Memu's listening response to Mohammad's asylum narrative demonstrates how the role of the interpreter is never a neutral activity and can be suffused with the norms of audibility defined by a culture of disbelief and suspicion that is usually associated with how the state listens. Thus, re-producing a debilitating distinction between legitimate/illegitimate subjects within the very spaces that are supposed to provide support and solidarity to refugees and asylum-seekers. What this story and the 'handbag incident' make clear is that it is important to attune to the moments of empathetic failure and how such moments of everyday rupture reveal discordant feelings and disagreement that need to be worked through.

The different stages of the 'handbag incident' demonstrate how Empathetic listening was practiced by the Drop-in manager. The manager listened to what the Nigerian woman had to say, whilst telling her that aggression would not be tolerated in the Drop-in without ultimately excluding her. Also, the  resulting moment of repair with the

hug between the woman and the volunteer demonstrates the complex agencies of people who attend and volunteer at the Drop-in who independently negotiate their identities and relationships as listeners and speakers. I argue that this represents a micro-political act  of 'ordinary citizenship' (Staeheli et al 2012) as the actors involved negotiated a more complex subjectivity and disagreements that challenges the listening and speaking positions defined by the state.

Finally, I want to discuss how the incident between Mohammad and Memu could have been negotiated differently to reflect on empathetic failure and the uneven power dynamics of the incident.  It would be naive to assume that because someone has first-hand knowledge of the hardships of the refugee experience that they will automatically empathise with another refugee. In order to reflect upon how the hostile environment and a culture of disbelief towards refugees and asylum-seekers is re-produced in both organisations it would be important to organise 'listening events' in which staff, volunteers and attendees would be present[22].

This speculative group could collectively reflect upon questions such as: how do approaches and ways of working become established? And, what are 'our' responsibilities to each other in these caring encounters? Listening to how different people felt about the dynamics of the Drop-in or the Advice Service could address some of the disagreements and issues present in these narratives. Such a proposed event represents a micro-politics of listening that takes disagreement seriously whilst attempting to transform the debilitating norms of audibility that can suffuse everyday encounters. Empathetic listening is an important practice of negotiating the frictions and dissonances that circulate within such organisations and it is from these negotiations that a potential counterpublic can be located. The next chapter on Bureaucratic listening will expand on the findings of this chapter by exploring how face-to-face interactions are entwined within a wider network of bureaucratic interactions and technologies.

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[22] For more insight into the possibilities of further reflective encounters please see:
Helen F. Wilson (2013), 'Learning to think differently: Diversity training and the 'good encounter'', Geoforum, 45, pp. 73-82.

Chapter 4
Bureaucratic Listening

*Bureaucratic listening:*

Is the practice of interpreting/articulating the legal frameworks and procedures of the UK asylum regime within the everyday, routine work of refugee and asylum-seeker services. Bureaucratic listening can be practiced with empathy but the bureaucratic listener is not necessarily empathetic. It can be conceived as a layered assemblage of listening practices that connects different listeners (eg: within a community Drop-in and a remote Home Office immigration officer) and it involves listening with and to different materials and technologies. Therefore, Bureaucratic listening is both embodied and disembodied.

## Introduction

An understanding of Bureaucratic listening will enhance the previous chapter by focusing on listening as a complex assemblage that includes face-to-face encounters and the wider network of other listeners (such as Home Office immigration officers) that are present within the disembodied voices of a telephone call and other materials and technologies such as: emails, letters from the Home Office, application forms and interview recordings. One of the main arguments that will run through this discussion regards how the state listens through advice workers and volunteers and how people come to listen like the state.

The 'listening state' is a concept developed by the legal studies scholars Sarah Craig and David Gramling (2017) in order to discuss the nation state's responsibilities within the adjudication of asylum applications. It is the state's responsibility to listen 'adequately' whilst judging the merits of an asylum application. Craig and Gramling ground their understanding of the 'listening state' in the notion of responsibility that signatory states of the 1951 Refugee Convention will 'cooperate with the person seeking refuge in the evaluation and also - crucially - in ascertaining relevant elements of their claim'. From this position they note that 'listening is tantamount to a choice signalling the state's intention to uphold refugee law' (2017: 80). Therefore, a focus on the bureaucratic architecture through which the state administers and makes decisions on asylum applications leads to an understanding of how the state listens[23].

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[23] The concept of the listening state can be contrasted with Scott's (1999) notion of seeing like a state: the state uses vision to render subjects visible, but it can also use sound to render some voices audible and others inaudible.

Although Craig and Gramling (2017) focus on the legal process of claiming asylum, their concept of the listening state can also be applied to the related context of administering accommodation and housing support for asylum-seekers, which is the main focus of this chapter. What will be highlighted across this chapter is how the state listens with suspicion and systematically mishears asylum applicants in a way that flouts the intentions set out by the Refugee Convention. Moreover, the way that the state listens in these contexts contradicts the approach to Deep listening that has so far been developed across this thesis (Back 2007; Bickford 1996). Before I introduce the different sections of this chapter, I want to discuss a recent media flash point that reveals something about how the state listens.

On Monday 31$^{st}$ 2019, a group of Iranian refugees (including a 10-year old child) were interviewed by immigration officials after they made a perilous boat journey across la Manche from Calais, coming ashore near Lydd-on-sea, in Kent. In a presentation to the news media, the then, Home Secretary, Sajid Javid gave a combative speech that reinforced the adversarial attitude of the Home Office towards those potential asylum-seekers who take matters into their own hands. Javid can be heard saying that:

> 'people shouldn't be taking this very […] dangerous journey, and if they do we also need to send a very strong message that you won't succeed. You're coming from France, which is a safe country […] in almost every case you're claiming asylum in the UK, but if you were a genuine asylum-seeker then you could have done that in a safe country and we need to send a strong message',
> (Javid, cited in Guardian 2019).

Posted on YouTube, Javid's articulation of the well worn trope of the legal/illegal immigrant is felt in the comments, as one user types: 'Of course they are not genuine, maybe one or two but probably most of them are just hungry tax money leeches'. Another user called 'Tom Dooley' goes one further, typing with a murderous intent: 'Open fire on them, that would send a message. It's an invasion, when you think about it..'. Although it would be an unjust generalisation to state that all UKVI and Home Office staff fall in line with Javid's comments about the 'illegality' of most asylum-

seekers, the speech is a performative utterance that indicates the extremely tough stance that the Home Office wants to project into the public sphere. It is a stance reflected in Nick Gill's (2016) research with Home Office immigration officers which reflects the anxieties about the political rhetoric that can influence their work. One immigration officer stated that: 'I think the longer you work there you become less open minded, [and] the more you start to think the rest of the people shouldn't be here, they should go back.' (Gill 2016:88). The circulation of such rhetoric raises important questions about the listening state: how can the state listen 'adequately' to the complicated stories of forced migrants if it has already pre-conceived that their claim is illegitimate and will therefore automatically fail? Here, the collective 'we' is resolutely not listening and these people won't succeed.

On this national media scale, the listening state is the antithesis of the Deep listening that has so far been developed within this thesis. Deep listening involves listening critically to what is said and heard whilst being open to the pre-conceptions of our own listening responses and the conflicts and disagreements that arise through listening to others. Represented by Javid's utterance, it appears that the listening state adheres to a particular set of archetypes or folk devils such as the 'illegal immigrant' as a disingenuous welfare sponge, who swarms at the borders of the UK (see Kushner 2010; Tyler 2013).

This chapter will focus on how such prejudices suffuse the bureaucracy of the asylum process within the local scales and everyday geographical sites of the Advice Service and the Drop-in. It will begin with a discussion of the application forms used by the Advice Service to claim Section 95 and 98 accommodation and financial support and the rituals of telling and listening that this administrative procedure involves. It will then focus on the precarious state of legal aid available to asylum-seekers before returning to the politics of interpretation and the controversial forensic linguistics used by the Home Office in the adjudication of asylum applications. In doing so, this chapter develops the argument put forward within the previous chapter by exploring the various technologies through which people listen, expanding the concept of embodied listening with feeling towards a disembodied encounter that is differently mediated.

The Rituals of Telling & Listening

This section will give an account of the Advice Service and the work that they do with individuals and families who have applied for asylum or have had their first asylum claim rejected and are appealing the decision. The Advice Service assists 'clients' who are facing financial destitution and homelessness and who, as asylum-seekers in the UK, are entitled to financial and accommodation support provided under the 1999 Act. Within the terms of the 1999 Act, this support is covered by Sections 95 and 98[24].

Section 95 provides accommodation and basic living expenses of £37.75 for each person in a household per week. This amounts to £5 per day and is currently 52% of income support levels for a single adult who receives mainstream unemployment benefit (see City of Sanctuary 2019). If an asylum-seeker is at immediate risk of homelessness and cannot wait for Section 95, then the Home Office should provide immediate emergency accommodation under Section 98 (see Right To Remain Toolkit 2019). This chapter will build on the overview of the wider context of the UK asylum regime provided in the introduction by exploring the routine practices of applying for support within the Advice Service. Usually, this begins with a referral from another organisation or a self-referral from a client. At this point, the client will then be given an appointment with an advice worker or volunteer, who will assist them with completing the 'Asylum Support Application form' (ASF1 Form)[25].

4.1

Staff and volunteers usually work from a printed copy of the ASF1 Form alongside a trusty appointment check-list (designed by Mark, the Project Manager). The check-list is a script that structures the appointment; it is important that as much information is gathered as possible (which can take multiple appointments) because the criteria for qualifying for the support is strict. I will now present a series of short extracts from Mark

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[24] Please see the overall introduction to this thesis for an overview of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 and the asylum regime in the UK.

[25] The provisions provided for asylum-seekers under the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act were covered in greater detail in the overall introduction to this thesis.

- the Project Manager at the Advice Service - to outline the standpoint from which these appointments are supposed to be conducted.

'The idea of advice is to non-directly give [the clients] options, attainable options, realistic options'.

'To think of ways to equip people to be enabled and empowered to deal with the system'.

'We are working with people in crisis. They come to us because they have an accommodation issue that needs sorting now'.

'We apply our expertise to that and a lot of the representations we make to the Home Office are very much in formal, professional, technical, legal language but we're interpreting what the client is telling us into that language'.
(AS Interview A)

Advice appointments take place in the office spaces that you can see in the maps of the Advice Service provided in Chapter 2. To begin a session the staff/volunteer will introduce what the Advice Service does and what they can assist the client with; it is important to stress the distinction that the Advice Service is a completely different and independent organisation to the Home Office and that the Advice Service will only share information necessary for the application that has been provided and agreed with by the client. In doing this, the staff/volunteer articulates the position of the Advice Service as an intermediary between the client and the Home Office, where the Advice Service's specific position is to give 'non-directive advice' and eventually, compile and send the Section 95/98 application if this is what the client wants. In the extracts, Mark states that it is essential that all advice is non-direct, which means that staff/volunteers need to support 'clients' with options for what they could do based on what they say, without directing the client's course of action so that they can make their own decisions (see Craig et al 2011).

According to Mark, an in-direct approach is supposed to equip people with an understanding of the asylum system and their position within it, whilst giving them some agency in decision making. However, as many of the Advice Service's clients come in a state of 'crisis' - for example: they may be staying with friends who can no-longer accommodate them or are sleeping rough - they arrive at the appointment with a problem that, as Mark says: 'needs sorting now'. The time sensitive nature of the work creates a dilemma because it puts pressure on the process and the practical crisis can take precedence over fully engaging the client in the application process. Something that is especially prescient if the client has mental health issues that have been exacerbated by their precarious situation or if they do not speak English.

The ASF1 form requires basic details, such as: names (and how to spell them); date of birth and their Home Office reference number, which is printed on their Application Registration Card (ARC card). A form of ID that is given to asylum-seekers after they have claimed asylum that contains their biometric data (UKVI 2019). On becoming a client of the Advice Service, the asylum-seeker will sign a consent form, which means that the organisation can speak on their behalf with the Home Office and other organisations (eg: the local council). The appointment marks the point where the person applying for asylum support becomes a 'client' of the Advice Service and therefore, a recognisable subject within the bureaucracy of the organisation, as they are re-inscribed into the asylum system as a receiver of support alongside their asylum claim.

When basic personal details have been recorded, the staff/volunteer needs to gather more personal, sensitive information about the client. In doing so, the staff/volunteer is required to ask questions on the ASF1 form that are designed by the Home Office and cover a range of details regarding the applicant's life whilst they have been living in the UK and about their wider social networks. To fulfil the evidentiary demands of the ASF1 Form, some of the information required includes: 6-months banks statements (annotated to give explanations of all transactions over £30); an address history of all the places the applicant has lived in the UK; as well as supporting statements from all the people who may have given them financial and accommodation support and why

they can no-longer support them. This initial appointment may last between 1 and 2 hours and further appointments are usually needed so that clients can gather the information, such as the letters of support from friends and family.

Once the application is complete and all the evidence is gathered together, the volunteer will then draft a supporting statement to represent the applicant to the Home Office, and as Mark describes in the extracts above; the statement involves listening to and interpreting the narrative of the applicant into the 'technical, legal language' used to communicate with the Home Office. The paper application is then scanned and sent via email to the 'Asylum Support Casework Team' at the charity Migrant Help[26].

## 4.2

By mediating applications for asylum support via the ASF1 form the Home Office is placing the burden of proof on the asylum-seeker. With the assistance of the Advice Service the applicant has to meet the exacting criteria that will be assessed by the Home Office for its 'truth', 'accuracy' and 'credibility'. Moreover, the demanding criteria is made tangibly present by the presence of the printed ASF1 form as the questions contained within are usually read out by the worker/volunteer. Although the Advice Service is independent from the Home Office and advocates and campaigns on behalf of the rights of asylum-seekers, the reading out loud of the questions creates an uncomfortable resonance between the Advice Service and the Home Office.

The completion of the ASF1 form is an important part of the bureaucratic process of applying for asylum support because it links this process with the legal context of claiming asylum. Common to both bureaucratic systems is a shared legal criteria where 'the burden of proving their case lies with the asylum-seeker' (Craig & Gramling 2017: 86). In legal terms, the burden of proof can define a duty placed upon a party to prove or disprove a disputed fact (see Legal Dictionary 2019). What is crucially important

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[26] Migrant Help has been providing asylum-seekers with support on behalf of the Home Office since 2014, and was recently awarded the AIRE contract (Advice, Issue, Reporting and Eligibility contact). The organisations website states that this contract will help them to continue and expand their role providing support to asylum seekers on behalf of the Home Office. It is not in the scope of this study to fully engage with Migrant Help's role in the administration of Asylum Support, but they will appear in this chapter as another administrative layer as Migrant Help have a direct relationship with the Home Office.

about the burden of proof is that it places responsibility on the asylum seeker to 'tell the truth' within a unequal bureaucratic system that adopts a adversarial attitude of disbelief towards the applicant. The wider attitude of disbelief is highlighted in the advice given by Right to Remain to people applying for asylum in the UK, when they state: 'be prepared not to be believed, 'it is common for the Home Office interviewer to explicitly say they do not believe you' (Right to Remain Toolkit 2019).

The burden of proof lies particularly heavily on asylum-seekers because of the unequal dynamics that imbue the asylum system where the state listens forensically and adversarially via the ASF1 form and other technologies. To listen adversarially is a combative stance that is distinct from the intersubjective, dialogic practices of listening that this thesis develops. If any uncertainties are present within the ASF1 application they will be scrutinised and if the strict criteria is not met (sometimes clients who have been homeless for a number of months or even years cannot remember their exact address history) the application will likely be returned to the applicant. It is a Bureaucratic listening that is procedural and done with little or no empathy for the gaps and lacuna in a person's narrative who may have an unstable and chaotic life. The concept of a state that listens adversarially to the claims made by asylum seekers is reminiscent of Judith Butler's (2004) concept of the 'hierarchy of grief'  that was introduced in Chapter 1. As the state listens with suspicion to the complex realities of asylum seekers, thus rendering their voices inaudible and insufficient to meet the burden of proof placed on them. If they do not meet this burden of proof them their legal claim to asylum is questioned and they are cast into the debilitating logic of the genuine/illegal asylum seeker. More importantly, interpreting forms such as the ASF1 raises a dilemma for the Advice Service as their work is entwined with the adversarial bureaucracy of the asylum regime.

Listening within the context of asylum support appointments is a fraught process of interpretation that involves asking difficult questions designed by the Home Office. The questions on the ASF1 form are read by the worker/volunteer, then the answers are spoken by the applicant, and if this is in a language other than English, it will then be voiced by an interpreter. The narrative of the applicant is then translated into the formal, legalistic language required by the ASF1 form. In assisting the client to meet the burden

of proof and the threshold of 'truthfulness' and 'credibility' as defined by the Home Office, the Advice Service worker/volunteer can find themselves (consciously or unconsciously) listening like the Home Office. In some ways, this is a necessary tactic in the time sensitive, goal orientated task of successfully applying for asylum support. What is important to note is that it is a bureaucratic process that involves a ritual of telling and listening where the volunteer attunes to certain parts of the asylum seeker's story, presenting it in writing in a way that emphasises the applicant as a destitute victim of their circumstances. Reflecting back on the interview extracts with Mark raises a question: how difficult is it to eke out a space within the appointment that can empower people to make decisions about their own lives?

The description of advice work provided by Mark is holistic and involves listening to and collaborating with the client; especially around the uncertainties that appear in the timeline of their narrative. Advice work involves doing the bureaucracy of asylum with empathy in a way that is successful in getting the support the client needs but listening against the grain of the adversarial system to share the load of the burden of truth. The next section will deal with the audible uncertainties that need to be addressed when applying for asylum support and will begin with a common technology of asylum administration; the seemingly infinite amount of email correspondence. The next section will begin by focusing on the story of Ayra, an asylum-seeker client of the Advice Service who I assisted to complete an ASF1 form. We will pick the narrative up at the point after the application had been sent.

Audible Uncertainty

4.3

Subject: Accessing Translations

Good Morning Ben,

Thank you for forwarding the copy of the RFI for the applicant.

Unfortunately we are not able to translate documents, but the applicant's solicitor might be able to do this for them.

Kind regards,

Migrant Help Advice Centre

(Adapted from anonymised emails from research files)

After submitting an ASF1 form for asylum support on behalf of Ayra, the Advice Service received the above in response from Migrant Help. An organisation who act as another layer of bureaucracy on behalf of the Home Office to administer asylum support applications. This email was part of a second round of correspondence after the Home Office had sent a Request for Further Information (RFI). Obviously, the initial application did not meet the exacting criteria for the burden of proof and with the assistance of the Advice Service, Ayra would have to submit more information. One of the further requests listed on the letter was…

'any statements that you provide must be translated into English as we cannot accept evidence in a foreign language. Migrant Help will be able to assist you with accessing organisations that can help you with document translation.'

The RFI request was perplexing; an immigration officer at the Home Office had assessed the ASF1, decided that more information was needed then sent the letter and we had to respond via Migrant Help. Our first question was: can Migrant Help assist Ayra with the translation of her bank account details, which were all in Arabic (as the RFI stated, the Home Office cannot accept evidence in a language other than English). Migrant Help's answer was negative, they cannot help. Our communication with Migrant Help highlights a frustrating bureaucratic feedback loop that will be addressed in this section. If the UKVI have confirmed that translation is a task that Migrant Help are responsible for, then why can't they help? Surely the UKVI know this, as it is the Home Office that gave the organisation a contract to provide advice services? Ayra was put in an impossible position because her solicitor had also informed her that they couldn't provide a free of charge translation service for the documents either. Until she could find a free Arabic to English translator her official bank documents would not be deemed evidence by the Home Office.

Ayra's dilemma highlights two important points: first, it demonstrates the (in this case) impossible burden of proof that is placed on asylum-seeker applicants; second, it is evidence of a monoglot listening state. The fact that all the submitted evidence needs to be translated into English does not appear extraordinary as all asylum and immigration law is conducted in English. What raises concern is that the Home Office places such a burden on applicants within a chaotic and incompetent bureaucratic system which means that people like Ayra can get caught in administrative purgatory, whilst they remain without support, which can force them into further destitution and a prolonged period of avoidable homelessness. Listening to documents such as the ASF1 and the RFI and the connective web of emails is reminiscent of John Torpey's (2000) study of the historical development of passport controls. Torpey argues that the development of passport controls (and other documents of inclusion/exclusion) were a key technology in establishing the 'nation-state as a prospectively ethnocultural unit

[that] must erect and sustain boundaries between nationals and non-nationals both at their physical border and among people within these borders (2000:1). The example of Ayra's RFI correspondence is counter-evidence that reveals the designed incompetence of the asylum bureaucracy in which the mono-lingual listening of the state would be less problematic if it was able to collaborate with asylum-applicants to assist them in translating documents.

## 4.4

The UNHCR's (2019) own guidelines for setting the criteria for refugee status notes that whilst the burden of proof lies with the asylum-seeker; 'the duty to ascertain and evaluate all relevant facts is shared between the applicant and the examiner (cited in Craig & Gramling 2017: 87).  Craig and Gramling (2017) write that the UNHCR's *Handbook on Procedure and Criteria for Refugee Status*, acts as a general guide for the state's obligation to those seeking asylum and this covers the general principle of the burden of truth, which as we know, lies with the person submitting an asylum claim. However, they go on to quote from the UNHCRs Handbook, stating that whilst this may be true of the burden of proof: 'the duty to ascertain and evaluate all relevant facts is shared between the applicant and the examiner (2017: 87). It is clear that the Home Office systematically ignores the shared responsibility towards the gathering of evidence for an asylum case. Such possible collaboration seems utopian in the current system, but further investigation of Ayra's situation will lead to further understanding of the incompetence of asylum bureaucracy as well as ways of listening bureaucratically that challenge the state's adversarial stance.

Placing the burden of proof on asylum-seeker applicants whilst taking an adversarial position ignores the complex and often treacherous trans-national journey's that forced migrants have to take before they claim asylum. It is a miracle that any documents survive a perilous journey across the Aegean Sea or aren't lost in the mud of a clandestine shelter in the wooded hinterlands of Calais. More than likely, an individual will claim asylum and not have all the required documents and then if they go onto apply for financial support, it is certain that they won't have extra money to pay for what documents they do possess to be translated.

At this point, I want to return to the extracts from the interview with Mark - the Project Manager at the Advice Service - and to our discussion about advice work and the role of listening. In the discussion Mark said that advice work involves,

> 'making sure that you fully listen to the client […] without letting your own presumptions interfere with what you're hearing [it's about] feeding back to them that you know what they're saying and about clarifying important point[s] and listening empathetically.'
> (AS A)

In this extract Mark articulates the role that listening plays within the appointments that have been described in this chapter. Bureaucratic listening needs to be practiced empathetically in a way that resonates with the concepts that underpin Deep listening . For example; Mark's understanding that listening to clients involves not letting what you hear be distorted by your own presumptions resonates with Back's (2007) notion of listening to others without preconceptions. In addition, the practice of feeding back what the other person is saying reflects the intersubjective nature of Dialogic listening. Bureaucratic listening with empathy requires collaboration between the interlocutors and this extends to the listening being open to the audible uncertainties that may be present in an applicant's narrative. Therefore, if a client cannot remember the full list of addresses they have lived at since arriving in the UK, the advice workers response is not one of automatic suspicion, but it reflects on why this may be the case and works with the client to negotiate these uncertainties. The description of listening outlined by Mark is an ethico-political act that challenges the adversarial attitudes of the Home Office and the listening state. It is a more flexible approach that explores a more progressive Bureaucratic listening that is open to the benefit of doubt, even though it is still essentially another form of monoglot listening within the nation-state.

A flexible and empathetic-bureaucratic listening not only involves the embodied practice described by Mark, it also involves listening with and through the bureaucratic structures and technologies of the asylum regime. Bureaucratic listening is a practice of

Layered listening in which face-to-face appointments are part of a wider assemblage of actors spread across the UK (Migrant Help have their offices in Dover) who make their presence felt via emails, letters and telephone calls. As this thesis has stressed, it is important to understand listening as embodied, but the listening with the different technologies of bureaucracy is done at a distance from the Home Office and individual immigration officers. With this in mind it is equally important to understand the disembodied practices of listening within the asylum system. The technologies of the listening state will be explored in the next section by continuing to probe the fallout of the RFI and the revelations about legal aid that the RFI query opened up. First, I want to make a further point about the designed incompetence of the Home Office.

## 4.5

Despite the strict evidence requirements and bureaucratic procedures, the Home Office is not an impenetrable monolith of governmentality. It can be more productively understood as a chaotic assemblage of different intersecting departments, for example: it is UKVI who administer asylum applications and the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), a section of UKVI that deals with asylum financial and accommodation support. Departmental communication is woeful; they are prone to making mistakes (like in Ayra's RFI); and overworked staff operate within a toxic wider culture of disbelief within an administrative system that is not fit for purpose and which is severely limited by the ongoing austerity agenda. Speaking with the benefit of hindsight after he'd left his position as Director General of Immigration Enforcement (2013-2015), David Wood stated that the impact of austerity and the major budget cuts to the Home Office, can 'partly explain the less humane approach to visas and immigration' (Wood cited in Grierson 2018). The bureaucracy of the Home Office is incompetent by design and suffused with a culture of suspicion, in which the asylum-seeker applicant is only ever listened to within the preconceived norms of audibility.

In our interview, Mark reflected on the position of front-line staff in the Home Office: 'I imagine the reality for a Home Office staff member is that there are teams that are significantly understaffed; they've got a lot of management pressure on them to […] either refuse or to request […] more evidence or to perform in a certain way' (AS A).

The Advice Service and the Drop-in face a dilemma because they have to work within the chaos of the Home Office system that is designed to frustrate. It is evident that listening within these received structures affects how people relate to each other but the services are not resigned to this way of working. What I want to argue is that the Advice Service (and the Drop-in) are part of a network of organisations and individuals that listen otherwise in a way that offers different possibilities. In the terms of a micro-politics of listening these counter-practices offer a way of opening up to audible uncertainties and communicative cooperation that challenges the prevailing way of administering asylum support applications. The conclusion of this chapter speculates about what this means for a different kind of 'state' listening. Prior to this, the next section will discuss the possibilities of a counter bureaucracy via a discussion of legal aid cuts and how state Bureaucratic listening is fundamentally compromised by austerity.

## Dreams of a Functioning Photocopier

### 4.6

As Mark stated in our interview, the wider policy of austerity has been one of the significant challenges for the Advice Service in recent years and as he noted: 'legal aid cuts have been a really big thing in the [asylum] sector - again linked to austerity - and impacting the poorest and the most marginalised' (AS A). Mark's comments reflect the research within asylum geography, as Andrew Burridge and Nick Gill write, that 'The decade from 2004 to 2014 saw severe cuts to civil legal aid in the immigration and asylum sector' (2016: 28). In this period the Legal Services Commission (LSC) imposed cost limits on legal practitioners that meant that only 5-hours of work could be assigned per asylum case (Singh and Webber 2010:2). These limits were attached to the asylum case rather than the adviser, so when a client was dispersed by the Home Office and they needed to find a new legal representative they found that their allotted hours had been used. Also, 'the LSC also removed funding for representatives to attend initial asylum interviews, leading to problems later in the process because representatives were unfamiliar with cases or what clients had said during their interviews' (Burridge & Gill 2016: 28).

In 2010, legal aid was reduced further when the LSC announced new contracts for legal aid and 410 of the firms seeking these contracts were turned down (Webber 2012: 68). Following this decision, further closures occurred as Refugee and Migrant Justice (RMJ) went into administration; an organisation with 13 regional offices and the largest provider of immigration and asylum representation in the UK (Webber 2012:68). After RMJ's closure, the second largest firm, Immigration Advisory Service (IAS) went into administration. Access to legal representation was also made more difficult after May 2012, after the Coalition Government made the decision to cut the annual £2.1 billion cost of the Legal Aid System, which was put into effect by the 2012 Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act. These changes have reduced the scope of the Legal Aid system, creating 'justice deserts' in branches of the law including: debt and housing, family law and welfare benefits and employment and immigration law (Curzi 2018).

In the previous narrative, Ayra submitted her asylum claim and was waiting for a decision on her case, which means that she will have had legal representation up to that point. Despite this, legal aid did not cover the cost of the translation of documents needed for her asylum support application. Ayra's case is an example of the precarious socio-legal status of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers in the UK, which was exacerbated by the austerity agenda of the Coalition Government (Burridge & Gill 2016). Furthermore, Hannah Lewis et al argue that the precarious position of forced migrants should be understood as a series of 'stratified rights' between asylum-seekers, refused asylum-seekers, and refugees, as people at different stages of the asylum process will note that individuals claiming asylum in the UK will 'experience different degrees of alienage at different stages of the asylum process' (2015: 12). To further discuss the unstable position of legal aid I want to return to Ayra's narrative and the creaking bureaucracy of asylum support.

4.7
At the time of receiving the RFI, Ayra did not have legal representation because she didn't have asylum support and having proof that you are in receipt of such support is a

key requirement for  obtaining Legal Aid in the UK. If you are an asylum seeker you have to demonstrate to your solicitor that you meet the criteria for Legal Aid, which means that you have to provide evidence of your asylum support - in the form of written confirmation that is less than 6 months old - to the solicitor so they can receive funds for the case via the Legal Aid Agency (LAA). Asylum-seekers used to receive a letter every 6-months that confirmed that they were entitled to asylum support, but the Home Office stopped issuing these letters[27]. Meaning that individuals like Ayra found it impossible to access legal aid.

Decisions about cost efficiency and the resulting (seemingly small) bureaucratic changes have a devastating domino effect; one that comes to the surface of things in the appointments of the Advice Service. In the appointment with Ayra and the series of emails and official Home Office letters than structured this encounter, this widely felt issue about cuts to legal aid was exposed. Ayra's story demonstrates the designed incompetence of the asylum regime that produces a socio-legal precarity for those seeking asylum. Moreover, a chaotic bureaucracy that values cost savings over human life and dignity 'becomes a key aid to the UK government determined to remove asylum seekers whose claims it sees as false or problematic. Uncertainty wears people down, through a continued state of anxiety and inability to make informed choices towards a future state of stability' (Burridge & Gill 2016: 36). Also, the encounter demonstrated the different bureaucratic pressures that structure listening encounters within the Advice Service who need to listen with the benefit of the doubt within an increasingly adversarial system. The next phase of this section will focus on how such ordinary encounters are part of a wider assemblage of actors who listen against the grain to challenge the norms of audibility defined by the asylum regime. In what follows, it is possible to develop a micro-politics of listening that resists the listening state and begins to build on different possibilities for how forced migrants are listened to when claiming asylum.

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[27] The basis for this decision is not clear as the Home Office never issued an official reason. Mark, the Project Manager at the Advice Service thought that it was to do with the ongoing cuts to the front-line service provided by the Home Office.

4.8

It is important to point out that the Advice Service does not offer legal representation, but due to the nature of the service, the problems with accessing legal aid surface in the day-to-day work of the organisation. What follows are two further examples from the Immigration Law Practitioners Association (ILPA) and their recent findings regarding problems with accessing legal aid from ILPA members in London, Manchester, Nottingham and Leeds amongst other places.

'24.01.2017: Legal Representative gets in touch with Home Office asylum support case work team by email (ASCorrespondence@migranthelpuk.org) for confirmation of asylum support.

15.02.2017: Legal Representative contacts client to identify if confirmation has been received. As no response has been received, a follow up email is sent to the Home Office.

14.03.2017: Legal Representative sends further email to the Home Office following up request.

08.05.2017: NASS finally sends written confirmation of asylum support'.

'I managed to get a response to a complaint where I advised the next step if we received no response was to send all clients to their MPs in order to get help to evidence their NASS. A manager actioned and provided evidence for around 20 older cases within a week. Unfortunately this has not continued and we are now not getting any response to emails even when we are attaching complaints. We are now getting passed from one number to another, all of whom advise that we should not be ringing on that number and asking us to write in. When we advise that we have done and we have received no response we usually get the

reply "we are trying to sort people's money out and you calling is preventing that"'.

(ILPA 2017: 3-4)

From the ILPA evidence it is possible to understand that incompetence and evasion are common even when an asylum-seeker has a legal aid representative. In the first example, the Legal Representative makes several attempts to get in touch with the Home Office via the official email - the 'ASC' address quoted above is the main way of contacting the Home Office, and it is where the Advice Service sends completed ASF1 Forms. Over a 5 month period the Legal Representative sends requests and follow-up requests until the confirmation of support finally arrives. In the second, the Legal Representative manages to get a response to a complaint by escalating the case via informing the Home Office that they will send client's to their MP. However, the Legal Representative's advocacy was only partially successful as the enquiry was then passed around different Home Office respondents in a feedback loop of administrative evasion where the Home Office eventually asked the Legal Representative to write rather than call. The ILPA example highlight how state policies and practices contribute to an incompetent bureaucratic system that is in contrast to the empathetic 'distance at close quarters' that Nick Gill (2016) found in the face-to-face interviews between Home Office immigration officers and asylum applicants. Through the administration of legal aid a bureaucracy that is purposefully slow - asking people to write rather than call - creates an uncooperative distance.

It is possible to ascertain that Bureaucratic listening is an assemblage of different listening events that are structured by an accumulation of different documents that include (but are not restricted to) ASF1 forms, RFIs, chains of emails as well as phone calls to different organisations and the Home Office. Although face-to-face appointments are central to the work of both the Advice Service and the Drop-in where embodied listening is an essential practice, it is also important to recognise the disembodied forms of listening that charge these encounters. The previous chapter introduced the disembodied voice of the interpreter who joins the appointment via a conference call. However, the different documents that have so far been discussed

also contain the absent-presence of different layers of listening. For example, the RFI request that was sent to Ayra can tell us something about how the state listens to the claims made by the asylum-seeker and this gives the document an uncanny affective weight. This resonates with Jonathan Darling's study of letters from the Home Office and how they 'produce particular affective fields [that] generate feelings, responses, and actions' (2014: 293). Attuning to the layers of multiple listening events contained within these documents and how they provoke further responses is important for exploring Bureaucratic listening and the distortions and mishearings that these documents might contain. Furthermore, the layers of listening events so far discussed also point to ways of doing bureaucracy otherwise.

4.9

As this chapter has progressed the assemblage of connected listening events has grown more complicated as the work of the Advice Service is not only related to the creaking bureaucracy of the Home office but also to the work of organisations such as the ILPA. In fact, I discovered the ILPA evidence via the Advice Service as they are part of a national network of organisations who work in the refugee and asylum sector who send each other information via a group email. I argue that these networked organisations practice a counter Bureaucratic listening as they are sensitive to the audible uncertainties voiced within an asylum applicant's narrative. Finding out that a client could not access translations via legal aid because they didn't have the relevant Home Office letter did not result in being suspicious of Ayra's case because it didn't meet the criteria set by the Home Office. What Bureaucratic listening involves in these examples is an ability to listen openly, critically and with the benefit of the doubt to (however briefly) share the burden of proof with the asylum applicant. Yes, the applicant is scrutinised as an individual asylum-seeker by the state, but the independent organisations that asylum-seekers come into contact with can understand their narrative within a wider socio-political context to negotiate the gaps and lacuna that may appear in their narrative as a result of the precarious situations they may face. Although, from a micro-political angle this may appear limited as it concerns the agency of those who represent asylum-seekers, it nevertheless, resonates with Bassel's definition explored in Chapter 1. What this chapter has explored is Deep listening as an

ethico-political act within the everyday spaces of refugee and asylum-seeker organisations that attempt to establish a 'shared responsibility towards changing the roles of speakers to listeners and to demand to be heard on different terms' (2017: 8). In this sense, a resistant collaborative bureaucracy is part of an audible form of citizenship that disrupts the norms of audibility of the asylum regime that listens with suspicion.

## 4.10

I want to briefly address the other slow technologies through which the Advice Service communicates with the Home Office. One afternoon when I was volunteering at the project the photocopier/scanner had started malfunctioning. The photocopier is an important part of the office infrastructure as it is used to scan completed ASF1 forms and copy folded or torn documents that need to be sent with applications. Frustrated by this recurring problem, Mark, the project manager said…

> 'it's sad, but sometimes I dream of a working photocopier"
> (Fieldnotes 2018).

Tasks such as photocopying are part of the routine of applying for asylum support - some documents may have been carried across continents or have been exposed to the incessant Manchester rain, so are creased and crumpled. Extra care has to be taken with these documents so the photocopier/scanner doesn't jam and such banal tasks can end up slowing down the time-sensitive nature of applying for asylum support. Throughout this chapter I have referred to the mistakes and general bureaucratic incompetencies of the Home Office, but the functioning of the Advice Service is also finely balanced. Old, untrustworthy equipment cannot be easily replaced by the Advice Service which has no regular funding (the Advice Service project only has funding to provide services for a 2-year period). Thus, the sound of a whirring, bleeping paper jam noise speaks to a wider network of 'precarity' that was discussed earlier in this chapter (Burridge and Gill 2016). Organisational fragility gestures towards the uncertain long-term future of such organisations, which provide listening spaces for those in need of advocacy and support.

You are only the mouth (Part 2)

This section will pick up the discussion about interpretation to focus on the technologies that are used in the adjudication of asylum cases. Previously, chapter 3 on Empathetic listening focused on the ethics and politics of interpretation when the interpreter is in the same space as the client. This section will focus on the presence of the disembodied voice of the telephone interpreter.

In an interview with Keje at the Advice Service, a female asylum-seeker who spoke very little English and needed a Kurdish Sorani interpreter, said: 'first of all I feel comfortable when I see face-to-face the staff, it makes the session more understandable […] and is convincing much better than the telephone call so this is something why face-to-face is much better way of communicating' (AS 1). Keje is referring to the routine appointments that have been the focus of this chapter where the interpreter is present via a conference call. Without undermining the problems of interpretation that have so far been discussed, it is important to stress that interpretation is never neutral and is prone to mishearing and distortions, but in the Advice Service and the Drop-in, listening to others via an interpreter requires a practice of listening 'adequately' through the medium of such flawed technologies. Although appointments are conducted face-to-face in both organisations, advice work involves embodied and disembodied forms of listening when we consider the voice of the interpreter. This section will engage in a broader analysis of Bureaucratic listening via the technologies of interpretation by focusing on forensic language analysis that was controversially used by the Home Office in the determination of asylum claims.

4.11

In February 2013, the Home Office began using Language Analysis for the Determination of Origin (LADO) to assist in assessing the nationality of asylum applicants claiming to be Syrian, Kuwaiti or Palestinian. LADO tests have been applied by governments since the early 1990s by European states and are similar to those

used by the Dutch Government to ascertain the origin of the Somali refugees that featured in 'part 1' of this section.

The LADO procedure rests on the assumption that an individual's speech is representative of the specific geographical place that person is from. Therefore, the procedure has been used to prove that an asylum applicant is from a country that is unsafe to return to (such as Syria since the outbreak of civil war in 2011) and not a neighbouring state that is deemed safe by the Home Office. In the UK, the Home Office first contracted the Swedish company Språkab to conduct the LADO tests and after their practice was criticised in a 2014 Supreme Court ruling (see Patrick 2016), another Swedish company, Verified AB, was contracted. The LADO reports produced by Verified AB follow an established routine (see Eades 2005) where an interview is conducted with a native speaker (for example: a Syrian national who speaks Kurdish Sorani), which is then analysed by a 'linguist' who does not have any knowledge of Arabic or Kurdish. The linguist, Yaron Matras (2018) assessed LADO reports (undertaken between 2015-2017), which were used by the Home Office to assess the nationality of Syrian asylum-seekers. According to Matras' analysis, Verified ABs reports 'do not make any reference to variation [in dialect] and treat it instead as an 'inconsistency', which is usually interpreted as an indication that the speaker is deliberately manipulating their speech' (2018: 63). Verified AB's reports echo the assumptions made by Memu in the previous chapter when he acted as an interpreter for Mohammad. In the narrative, Memu became suspicious of Mohammad, saying that he wasn't truthful about his nationality and that he didn't sound Palestinian.

The Verified AB reports are not based on personal assumptions about a particular Arabic accent. Alternatively, they supposedly offer a scientific approach to forensic language analysis, however they are flawed because of the pre-conceived assumptions they hold about the homogenous nature of language, which is assessed by a 'linguist' who does not speak either Kurdish or Arabic. Matras' (2018) analysis states that the majority of the LADO reports were with young males (between the ages of 17 - 25) who were interviewed upwards of 2-years after they had made their journey of refuge.

Strikingly, none of the reports included in Matras' study had taken into account the life histories of the individuals.

> 'In most cases [the asylum applicants] report having spent pro-longed periods of time in the company of other migrants from other countries. Some report to have flatmates from other countries who speak other varieties of Arabic and Kurdish, respectively. In at least five cases applicants reported to have a parent who had been a migrant, and in an additional five cases Arabic -speaking applicants reported to have left Syria at the age of 14 or younger and to have lived for several years in Egypt before migrating to Europe'.
> (Matras, 2018: 63)

From Matras' findings it is possible to further understand how the state listens 'forensically' via the use of technologies such as LADO that are presented as objective, scientific 'truth' regarding the nationality of Syrian asylum applicants. The listening responses of the anonymous Verified AB linguists, who as expert listeners are the ears of the Home Office in these reports, resonate with the listening response of Memu who assumes that Mohammad is an illegitimate asylum-seeker due to his Egyptian sounding accent. What these accounts highlight is the different layers of (dis)embodied listening that occurs across an assemblage of encounters within the process of claiming asylum. The comparison between the two accounts resonates with Jan Blommaert's critique of UK LADO procedures that are driven by an understanding of language that makes 'time and space static' and doesn't account for the malleability of language as it transforms across the trans-national journey of the refugee (2009: 421). In terms of audible citizenship, what these accounts highlight is that the nation state listens by homogenising the voices of asylum-applicants, thus denying the complex agencies of those who make the journey to Europe. To conclude this section I want to discuss the forensic linguistic counter-expertise that can challenge the dominant norms of audibility before relating back to the Advice Service and the Drop-in.

4.12

Matras (2018) concludes his report by arguing for a 'inductive-dialogical' approach to analysing the language of asylum applicants. An inductive-dialogical analysis was presented as counter-evidence by Matras to a judge of a 'First Tier Immigration Tribunal' and the Home Office decision to deny the applicant's asylum case was overturned (Matras 2018)[28]. Similar to the findings presented in Lawrence Abu Hamdan's Conflicted Phonemes project (see previous chapter), the inductive-dialogical approach takes into consideration the complex life histories and trans-national journey's of forced migrants. Although both of these examples offer a critique of the listening state by concentrating on the technologies through which the state listens bureaucratically, they are informative for considering the micro-politics of listening within the everyday contexts of refugee and asylum-seeker services. For example: in the Drop-in, a consideration of how an individual's language is shaped by their circumstances and journey would be essential to any proposed collective, reflective listening about the nature of the service and the training that is provided to the volunteer interpreters. Such a reflective listening practice and learning to listen otherwise would provide the time and space to discuss and challenge the norms of audibility that can charge encounters within the Drop-in. Listening for complexities without suspicion is part of a counter bureaucratic practice that is open to the audible uncertainties within asylum-applicants narratives and it offers a collaborative approach that shares the burden of proof that is usually placed on the individual asylum-seeker.

Moreover, an exploration of the composition of language and accent would be an interesting point of departure for a creative project in either organisation. Again, at the Drop-in, the choir could not only make a point of singing songs in different languages but could sing songs in different dialects of Arabic and Kurdish as well as popular songs in shared Koiné forms. What such a proposed project would emphasise is an audible form of citizenship that does not listen suspiciously to the diversity and creativity of language, but emphasises that asylum-seekers are involved in actively shaping a more complex narrative than the debilitating tropes of legitimate/illegitimate or

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[28] Individuals applying for asylum in the UK who have their first claim rejected can appeal their decision at a First Tier Immigration Tribunal. This is the first court that an asylum applicant can appeal the Home Office's refusal and the applicant does not need to seek permission to appeal. For a detailed introduction to the asylum 'appeals process' please see Right To Remain (2019).

legal/illegal. Thus presenting an affective geography of the voice (Kanngieser 2012) that is dissonantly polyphonic and is representative of a counterpublic that does not conform to the homogenous, monoglot listening state.

## Conclusion

Two significant developments were introduced during this chapter; the first, was the engagement with the concept of the listening state and how the Home Office listens via bureaucratic technologies such as the ASF1 form. The second, is the understanding of Bureaucratic listening as both an embodied and disembodied practice that is composed of layers of different listening acts spread across a wide geographic territory.

By engaging with the bureaucratic presence the Home Office has in the Advice Service this chapter discussed how the state listens to the claims of asylum-seekers with suspicion whilst placing the burden of truth on individuals within an unequal and incompetent system. The chapter also focussed on the rituals of telling and listening that occur with the routine bureaucratic encounters within the Advice Service in which advice workers/volunteers can end up listening like the state. This is a central dilemma for refugee and asylum-seeker organisations because it means listening to others whilst interpreting the adversarial technologies of the Home Office.

The discussion about the dilemmas of Bureaucratic listening engaged with more empathetic approaches that were developed in the previous chapter. In the Advice Service and the Drop-in it is clear that the bureaucratic can be performed with empathy, but the bureaucratic is not necessarily empathetic. To listen bureaucratically in the Advice Service and the Drop-in demands further attunement to the dynamics of the listening state and the norms of audibility that charge routine bureaucratic encounters. More specifically, it means listening critically to audible uncertainties and collaborating to share (however briefly) the burden of truth placed on the individual asylum-seeker applicant. In doing so, this chapter made a claim for the possibilities of a counter bureaucratic practice that listens against the grain of the listening state.

A counter bureaucracy is better understood through the wider network of refugee and asylum-seeker organisations that was highlighted by the focus on legal aid. When considered as a network of organisations, it is easier to understand how counter bureaucratic practices can be developed. Offering a way of doing bureaucracy that is more collaborative as it is attuned to the structural inequalities that compromise how an asylum-seeker can represent themselves and ultimately, how they are listened to by the Home Office. Moreover, a collaborative approach strives to share the burden of proof with the asylum-seeker and does not treat any uncertainty with outright suspicion; thus challenging the hostile asylum regime that only listens mono-lingually and within the received structures and norms of audibility built on an adversarial system.

The second significant contribution that this chapter has advanced is the exploration of Bureaucratic listening as an assemblage of different listening acts that includes face-to-face encounters, but also those at a remove such as Home Office immigration officers and other third sector workers. Thinking about the different intersecting layers of Bureaucratic listening enlivens the materials through which we listen by engaging with the 'affective economy' (Ahmed 2004) that documents such as the ASF1 form are charged with. These documents (and the accompanying circulation of emails) reveal how different actors listen as absent presences within the wider bureaucratic network. Therefore, this chapter has explored listening as both an embodied and disembodied practice as it is important to understand how the different technologies intersect with more visceral everyday encounters within the spaces of the Advice Service and the Drop-in.

Finally, the aim of this chapter is not to make suggestions for how the Home Office could incrementally improve the asylum regime.  Through this chapter I have made clear that the Home Office should not be understood as a bureaucratic monolith, but an incompetent network of different departments whose limits have been exposed by the policy of austerity. The Home Office is also a monoglot listener as was highlighted by the RFI request that all documents should be provided in English. Such a listening state is inadequate for listening adequately to the claims and narratives of asylum-seekers because it homogenises and simplifies the complex, trans-national identities

that they have developed as refugees. The critique of the Home Office as a monoglot listener and the concept of the listening state developed in this chapter draws upon and contributes to research within political and asylum geography as it outlines an aural dimension to everyday encounters structured by cuts to legal aid (see Gill 2016; Mountz 2004).

At present and into the not too distant future, refugee and asylum-seeker organisations will still be negotiating the vicissitudes of the Home Office. However, the nascent forms of counter-bureaucracy located in the refugee and asylum-seeker service networks offer a glimpse at an audible citizenship that escapes the norms of audibility defined by the nation-state. If asylum organisations seriously consider the importance of listening critically to audible uncertainties and the uneven dynamics of the monoglot state, then perhaps future organisations dealing with the legal claims of others would be able to listen multi-lingually. Offering a radical form of collaboration that transcends the suspicions of the monoglot norms of audibility that define the asylum regime. Therefore, a person could speak and recount their narrative in their preferred language and the legal system would recognise this in all its complexity and difference.

Chapter 5
Ambient Listening

*Ambient listening:*

Focuses the listeners attention on the texture and atmosphere of a space/place. It involves attuning to how the character and intensity of sound is transformed by the particular characteristics of architecture and it involves attuning to the messy coagulations of voices, materials and technologies that charge direct communicative interaction. The ambient is ever present, it surrounds us and connects us to others and the wider environment in ways that matter. By listening to the ambient environment it is possible to develop an understanding about how public/community spaces are designed and who has the right to be heard in these spaces.

Introduction

Ambient listening focuses on the sonic environment of each organisation. As the definition above states, it involves a deeper attention towards the textures, materials and atmospheres that have appeared in both the Empathetic and Bureaucratic listening chapters in order to get to grips with the more ephemeral nature of sounds, whilst tuning-in to the 'affective economy' of listening within the noisy social spaces of the Advice Service and the Drop-in (Ahmed 2004).

In terms of Deep listening, exploring the sonic ambiences of the Advice Service and the Drop-in resonates with Pauline Oliveros' (2005) understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of listening. Therefore, Ambient listening involves attuning to how more 'intimate' interactions overlap and contribute to more 'global' public dimensions; knitting what is said, heard and felt by individuals into the wider ambience of a shared social space. As an example of attuning to the ambient, I want to return to the narrative of the 'handbag incident' that featured in chapter 3 on Empathetic listening. For the Nigerian women, her anger and outburst exposed a particular affective barrier and a perceived social hierarchy between 'insider' refugee volunteers and 'outsider' attendees like herself. The women felt discriminated against because she didn't speak Arabic and this was the reason why the Arabic speaking shop volunteers had sold the bag on after the women had asked them to save it for her. The commotion of the event ripped through the calm rhythm of the afternoon, as the Drop-in manager and Salma attended to the situation and people watched on.

The handbag incident demonstrates how Empathetic listening is practiced in negotiating the dissonant relationships of the Drop-in, but the event can also be articulated in terms of a particular ambience that erupted in shouts and remonstrations that punctuated the social space of the main hall. In terms of an audible form of citizenship, the burst of intensity that was witnessed in the handbag incident

demonstrates an affective 'geography of the voice' (Kangiesser 2012). The Nigerian women hears the voices of Arabic speakers in the ambience of the Drop-in and this results in a certain affective barrier in which her voice and bodily presence is differently situated to those supposedly more privileged 'insider' Arabic speaking volunteers.

There is a micro-politics to Ambient listening that reflects Lauren Berlant's (2011) concept of 'Ambient citizenship' that was introduced in Chapter 1. To reiterate Berlant's (2011) terms; the ambient is 'a mode of belonging […] that circulates' with 'an affective, emotional, economic, and juridical force that is at once clarifying and diffuse' (2011: 230). For example, take the handbag incident from chapter 3: this event clarifies a social hierarchy in the Drop-in that is experienced by certain attendees, but as an explosive atmosphere it diffuses around the main hall. Transforming into an event where certain affective barriers snap into place. The atmosphere and texture of a particular sonic environment (composed of a polyphony of different languages and voices; architectures; organisational rhythms; buzzing phone lines and malfunctioning photocopiers) could be experienced as a sense of belonging, whilst simultaneously, these same sounds could work to exclude others. The concept and practice of Ambient listening differs from Berlant's (2011) definition of the term in that it focuses on the listening cultures of semi-institutional spaces and is developed as a sonic ethnographic practice.

The first section of this chapter will focus on how the sonic environment is understood and described by workers, volunteers and friends of both the Drop-in and the Advice Service. It will discuss the group listening workshops that were used (and why they were only used in certain contexts) as a way of listening back to audio recordings made at the organisations and the resulting conversations about the sonic environment. The second section will focus on the bodily choreographies of listening and the ad hoc ways that public space is designed to manage the flow of people and the sonic intensity of certain spaces. The final section involves listening again to interview recordings with participants to listen to the ambiences of these encounters. The third and final section will also engage with the sonic qualities of kinship and the audibility of children within the Drop-in.

Ambient Intensities

Ambient is the appropriate term for the tone of this chapter because it is flexible enough to encompass a set of concepts and understandings such as feelings, mood and atmosphere. For example: a public ambience can be composed of various materials; textures; atmospheres; sounds and bodies that oscillate between the intimate and public to shape how people feel in certain space-times. Out of these assemblages more collective feelings may emerge, not as inert backgrounds to the action, but as that which circulates within the public spaces of each organisation[29].

5.1

I would like to return to the interview extract with Penny (one of the advice workers at the Drop-in) that was introduced in Chapter 3. In our conversation, Penny expressed her anxieties about her ability to listen well, stating: 'it is really difficult to do in-depth listening in this environment…'. The environment that she was speaking about was the main hall of the Drop-in, and she went on to describe this space, saying…

'maybe I've got a rose tinted perspective of [the drop-in], but in my rose-tinted eyes it's a friendly…as crazy as it is, it's a friendly-crazy environment. There's quite a lot of love in the building' (DI A).

Our conversation concerned the direct, face-to-face listening of advice work as it unfolds in the main hall of the Drop-in. However, the extract also demonstrates that Penny has an awareness of the ambience of the Drop-in and how this affects the intensity of advice work. Her awareness is present in her anxieties around being heard and her description of the environment. By listening again to Penny's interview, I want

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[29] This phrase is adapted from the introduction that was handed out to attendees of the 'Public Moods' workshop. An event that took place at The University of Durham in January 2019, which was organised by Ben Anderson, Helen F. Wilson and Ester Hitchen (2019).

to unpick the description of the main hall as "friendly-crazy" and to mix this with other people's descriptions of the main hall's ambience.

Penny's description of the wider environment - one that is inclusive of the sonic but is essentially multi-sensuous - describes both the ambience and the daily rhythms of the Drop-in. The wider atmosphere is friendly and crazy as well as welcoming and chaotic: at certain times and to some people it is a safe, inclusive space but at other times it can be interpreted as exclusive and overwhelming. The ambience of the Drop-in is complex and can at times be intense and dissonant; a feeling that was echoed by Ghashia - a friend and volunteer of the Drop-in - who also contributed to the Empathetic listening chapter. She positively associated the sound of the Drop-in as representing "different languages; different cultures", but also that people's interactions were not always "100% positive" (DI 2)

Awert, another friend of the Drop-in that I interviewed, associated a similar sense of welcome with the sound of the Drop-in, whilst also stating that it can be problematic during the appointments that take place in the main hall behind the partitions. Awert said that: "it is a problem because it can be hard to understand, hard to listen when you are trying to have a conversation" (DI 1). To emphasise his point, he mentioned that Penny regularly has to manage goings-on in the drop-in, such as reminding parents to look after their children who are "playing and screaming" (DI 1). What becomes clear in these responses is that the ambience of the Drop-in is a complex weave of intensities, rhythms, sounds/noises, feelings, moods and bodily choreographies that ebb and flow and affect people differently. The aim of this section is to hold onto these fleeting assemblages for a moment to understand how different situated bodies can affect and be affected by the public ambiences of each organisation.

5.2
It is possible to get to grips with the ambience of a place through engaging with the reflections of individual interviewees, but this chapter will engage aurally with the sonic environment by introducing two audio recordings. *Job Centre Listening* was recorded

at the Drop-in and *Classical Reception* was recorded in the Advice Service[30]. They will be accompanied by participant reflections and my own auto-ethnographic writing in order to compose a more detailed description of the sonic environment.

If possible, whilst listening; focus on the sound world as a whole, or focus on a particular sound; tracing its beginning and how it transforms through the duration of the recording. You may also want to listen to the recording again after you have engaged with the other responses. Now, please listen to *Job Centre Listening*.

After listening back to and reflecting on *Job Centre Listening*, I recorded in my listening diary…

> 'the sound of a choreographic ritual and a marked slow down in the day's activities, which transition from the more hectic rhythms of advice work and social clatter to the gradual emptying of the hall. But still, some sounds persist; noises which refuse this transition into late afternoon'
> (LD A 14 09 2017).

*Job Centre Listening* was also included in a group listening workshop that was conducted with workers and volunteers at the Drop-in. The listening workshop was a group activity initiated to encourage participants to reflect on recorded representations of their daily environments. In the session, each recording was introduced with a set of questions, such as: 'where in the building was this recorded?' And, 'what sounds are you attracted to in the recording?' (DI Workshop). The following quotes are from three different participant's reflections on listening to the recording…

> 'The kids do seem to go a little crazy on Thursday afternoons, when there's a bit more space'.

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[30] Please use the link to access audio:
https://www.dropbox.com/home/BEN%20Sound%20Files

"Sometimes in the background it makes the drop-in sound like a warm friendly place […] with all the noise".

'It's not a great environment to have a conversation, even if it's private enough, you're not as focused, you can hear everything that's going on outside and it's echo-y'.
(Anonymised worker and volunteer responses)

The anonymous responses above emphasise the diversity of perception regarding the sonic environment of the main hall of the Drop-in. It is clear that the main hall is a dynamic space in which children can play and "go a little crazy"; these sounds also dissipate into a wider ambience that another participant called a "warm and friendly place" (DI workshop). My own listening response contributes a sense of the specific space-time of the audio recording, which is marked by polyrhythmic activities that range from the more 'hectic' advice work to the slower pace of the afternoon. However, this is not a smooth transition into the afternoon as blockages in the flow of ongoingness remain.

In this sense, the Ambient listening that this chapter is concerned with is not the ambience we may associate with the frictionless, non-place of an airport or the muzak of a shopping centre (see Thompson 2017: 275). What can be heard are the frictions and arhythmic flows that are contested in the sounds that can be heard within this public space. It gives a sense of the diverse, visceral reactions to the sound space of the organisation as well as revealing an understanding about the norms of audibility that define this space. Thus raising two questions: does this recording really represent a warm ambience of belonging? Or do the sounds in this recording represent the underlying tensions of an over subscribed service? Before engaging with these questions, this section will discuss the form of the listening workshop.

The introduction of the workshop raises a question: what does group listening add to a research design that cannot be fulfilled through one-on-one conversations or semi-structured interviews? In the interviews I conducted, participants reflected on practices

of listening as advice workers, whereas the workshop provided a space in which participants engaged in the practice of listening back to audio recordings. Although questions are used to structure the group listening experience, the participants do not have to respond directly to a question or engage in a listening that has human voice as its main object of focus (like when one listens to an interview).

This approach resonates with Helen F. Wilson's notion that listening to 'sounds out of context' can 'enliven the senses to those things that go unnoticed (2016: 168). The use of playback in the group setting is a audio method of enquiry that encourages participants to reflect upon the sonic environments that they may be consciously or unconsciously aware of as is evidenced in the anonymous responses quoted above. As a method it has been developed within the field of sonic geographies to explore listening to places through the use of sound diaries (see Duffy & Waitt 2011). The listening workshop also provides a space in which participants can reflect upon a phenomena from their daily environments that may otherwise be hard to reflect upon due to the demanding nature of advice work. This section will now return to a further analysis of *Job Centre Listening* before introducing *Classical Reception*.

## 5.3

Listening back to *Job Centre Listening*, I was struck by the classical music drifting through the recording. During the listening workshop one of the participants recognised this as Vivaldi's Spring, which is used by the Job Centre as hold music for their call centres, and was presumably selected for its sense of calm. The presence of Vivaldi's Spring is another punctuation of the sonic environment of the main hall that adds another intriguing textural layer. *Job Centre Listening* was recorded in the afternoon when the activities of the advice sessions in the morning slow-down and transition into lunch-time. After lunch is when social activities, such as choir practice, happen alongside general tidying up.

In the recording, the presence of the hold music means that the morning's activities linger; they do not fit neatly into the drop-in's 09:30-15:00 schedule, thus leaving a presence of things left alone and yet to be done. The ambience outlined here is a

mundane one; containing different feelings and tones where a child's play is woven into the sound of a 'warm friendly place', but can also be interpreted as 'a little crazy'. This latter response from an anonymised participant chimes with Awert's earlier description, where the noise of children becomes an ear-bothering scream. From these different descriptions it is clear that the main hall does not have one dominant ambience or atmosphere; instead it has a layered complexity that affects people differently.

The diversity of the ambient is reminiscent of Ben Anderson and James Ash's writing about atmospheres; they write that 'rather than a single, overarching, dominant atmosphere' a place can be 'constituted by many different atmospheres; ones that touch, make contact, merge, and rub-up against one another' (2015: 168). The responses to these complex sonic environments gives a sense of what the participants think about who has the right to contribute to the sound space of the Drop-in. Here, the sound of children is contentious as Awert is of the opinion that their presence is disruptive of intimate advice sessions, whilst other perspectives weave these sounds into contributing to the general 'warmth' of these accounts. To demonstrate a contentious mode of belonging in which some voices and sounds are more unwelcome than others.

Adding to this analysis from the advice perspective, in *Job Centre Listening* you can hear the voices and sounds of those who are lingering beyond the time allocated to advice work. The advice workers have not seen these people and their continued presence is a demand to be counted to have their issues heard. Ambient listening involves an affective economy of listening where the coagulation of sounds that circulate charge different listening responses with the norms of audibility that come to define a particular space. Should the children's playing be curtailed somehow? And what is the problem with those few lingerers who remain by the advice office in order to catch the ear of either Penny or Salma? These questions will be addressed alongside further analysis of the sonic environment of the Advice service.

In an effort to rub two different organisational atmospheres together, I would like you to listen to another audio recording, *Classical Reception*. This recording was made at the

Advice Service and it contains three different fragments from the same recording. When listening back, try and attune to the temporal flow and rhythm of the goings-on present in the recording. Again, you can focus on the sound world as a whole, or on a particular sound; tracing its beginnings and how it is transformed through the duration of the recording.

## 5.4

*Classical Reception* was culled from a longer recording that was made by myself at the reception desk in the Advice Service; an area that sits between the open plan office and the public-facing waiting area. The recording has been edited because there is a lot of foot traffic in this particular part of the office; as staff and volunteers walk between their own desks and the reception to call 'client's' for scheduled appointments and to greet people who walk-in randomly off the street. Therefore, for the purposes of anonymity, any voices and other identifiable characteristics of anyone in particular have been edited out of *Classical Reception*. What remains is the incidental everyday ongoingness of the Advice Service.

In *Classical Reception*, the sound of Classic FM drifts through the office space. Classic FM does not usually provide the daily soundtrack to the office - most likely it will be 6 Music or Gold FM - so what is heard on Classical Reception is not the result of anyone's decision to use the station to impose a sense of calm, like the recording of Vivaldi's Spring might do as part of the Job Centre's hold music. Rather, its presence in the ambience is part of a sense of a quiet getting-on-with-things in the office. *Classical Reception* was recorded after the morning rush of appointments; just before volunteers and workers usually take their lunch prior to the afternoon advice sessions. In this sense, it represents a slowing down of the rhythms of work that is similar to the space-time of *Job Centre Listening*.

However, listening back to *Classical Reception*, to the layers of activities present: the traffic lights; radio; fingers tapping and bodily functions, there is a dryness to the sound that is distinct from how the sound of the Drop-in is described in the group listening workshop. In part, the dry sound of the recording is due to the material properties of

the office; it has low ceilings and the reception area is narrow and is tightly arranged with a large plant, a fax machine and the reception desk. Part of the wall behind the fax machine is a glass window, which means that you can see into one of the offices used for appointments; on the right hand side there is another, smaller appointment room and between these, the reception.

In contrast, the main hall of the Drop-in is reminiscent of a school gymnasium; the floor is wood panelled and the ceiling is high. One of the anonymous participants in the workshop described the "echo-y" nature of the sounds in *Job Centre Listening*; an echo that amplifies the sounds, adding an extra intensity. By making this distinction it is not my intention to create a relaxed/intense dichotomy to describe the sonic environment of each space. The Advice Service does not offer a more straight-forwardly 'ideal' listening environment but a quieter intensity.

This sense of a quieter intensity was reflected by Nubia - a social work student who worked in both organisations - who I interviewed. In her response to the question "how would you describe the environment of the Advice Service? she said: "...[exhales] I think it is organised". However, Nubia also added some further reflections in which she compared both organisations, starting with her experience of the Advice Service...

> 'You're not running around, you're doing all the chaos with the phone in your
> hand and you know […] one phone is ringing and you've got to answer another
> and ring someone back and then a client is ringing saying; "you remember who I
> am, you've done this with me"…and you're like oh, errr! …I think that
> sometimes it's harder that way because at [the Drop-in] you can see them; you
> remember that face and it reminds you. Whereas a lot of the time at [the Advice
> Service]…it's all on the phone so you're just dealing with the voice…'
> (AS Interview B)

In this extract, Nubia is reflecting on the follow-up work that workers and volunteers are responsible for after the appointment with the 'client'. This work can involve photocopying documents, sending emails and making phone calls. The amount of

follow-up work varies with each 'client', but in particularly complex cases it can spill over into the lunch period and the quieter moments and slower rhythms recorded in *Classical Reception*. For Nubia, the memory of dealing with multiple telephone calls - and presumably doing this at the same time as other people - creates a lot of "chaos", and this "chaos" is distinct from that of the Drop-in because you're sat at a desk with a phone in your hand rather than "running around". From Nubia's reflections we can grasp that the sonic environment of the Drop-in has a more obvious intensity; it is a public space open for advice but also a free lunch and various other activities. Whereas the Advice Service provides a specific, appointment-only service that deals with Section 95 financial and accommodation applications for asylum-seekers. Still, *Classical Reception* gives the sense of a quiet intensity, or a more subtle chaos that affects how it is possible to listen to others.

Nubia's comments also give some insight into the different choreographies of each organisation. In the Drop-in, although advice sessions take place in designated rooms, there is a lot of moving through the different spaces and navigating the barrage of questions and requests as you do so. As the Advice Service is an appointment-only service, most sessions appear more ordered and most of the interaction with clients takes place in the appointment rooms. The choreographies of each organisation and how this affects how people listen to each other will be addressed in the next section.

Listening to both recordings also gives you a sense of who contributes to the sound spaces of the Drop-in's main hall and the Advice Service's open plan office space. From *Job Centre Listening* it is evident that the main hall is a bustling community whose ad hoc, improvised spaces are re-arranged across the day to accommodate the varying activities. The Advice Service does not have such busy public spaces; as an appointment-only service the choreography of attendees is more managed. Here, the reception marks a barrier between the spaces of the office - where workers and volunteers can be heard - and the reception and appointment offices where 'client's' visit. Rarely will 'clients' linger or stop in the office areas. If an appointment takes place in one of the upstairs rooms then 'clients will be let in through the security door between the reception and the corridor that leads to the stairs for the first floor. If this is

the case then they will not even set foot in the office (but they will be heard passing through).

In terms of what can be heard in the ambience of each organisation the Advice Service is a much more formalised working environment; there is much more of a distinction between those who work at the organisation and those who seek its services. The architecture of the Advice Service creates a distinction, meaning that the mingling of 'different languages; different cultures' is not as audible in the sonic environment of the Advice Service. These spatial distinctions are inherited: the Advice Service operates in a rented building that has not been designed for their specific use; therefore the building structures the sound space of the organisation, affecting who is audible and where they are audible in the building.

The architecture of the building determines the norms of audibility with the Advice Service which seemingly sets up a clear distinction between the active worker/volunteer and the passive asylum-seeker who is the recipient of support. A dynamic that's present in the mobile worker/volunteer who opens the security door to the reception, calls the client through and leads them to the office. However, the contribution of the asylum-seeker client comes to the fore through the practice of indirect advice; the client collaborates with the organisation whenever possible, they gather their evidence themselves and make the final decisions about how to move their application forward. This section will conclude with a reflection on my own pre-conceptions of my listening experience and why a group listening workshop was not organised at the Advice Service.

## 5.5

Trying to articulate the quieter chaos of the Advice Service made me confront some of the pre-conceptions I had made about the sonic environments of each organisation. Listening back to the audio recordings presented here, reminded me of my own preconception that the Drop-in was a more sonically rich experience. At first, I engaged with the more audible intensities of the Drop-in, which meant that I did not pay as much attention to the ambience of the Advice Service. Through conversations with

participants such as Nubia, and my ongoing immersion in the everyday environment of the Advice Service, I came to reflect on the ambience more clearly. Each of the organisations has a different sonic texture and it was just that my own practice of Ambient listening happened at a slower pace in the Advice Service. Finally, reflecting on the different practices of listening in this section leads me to address another omission in this chapter: why is there no group listening workshop from the Advice Service?

The way that the Advice Service operates did not allow for a period of time appropriate for the workshops. This is not to say that Mark (the project manager) or any of the volunteers wouldn't participate if there had been, but the service is run on a very tight schedule where volunteers come in to perform time-sensitive advice work. Therefore, as a researcher-volunteer I found that observer-participation; semi-structured interviews and ethnographic writing were more appropriate for adapting to the work of the organisation. As an intervention, a workshop would have been too disruptive of the day-to-day work of the service. However, the Drop-in had a monthly meeting for staff and volunteers, meaning that there were periods of time outside the drop-in service to play with and participants were open to the idea of doing the listening workshop as part of a meeting.

Another key point to make regards the tripartite position of the researcher. Ambient listening differs from the inter-related practices of Empathetic and Bureaucratic listening because it is not a skill that is directly articulated by the participants. For example: Ambient listening is not part of the training of professional care workers and worker/volunteers tended to speak more lucidly about forms of Dialogic listening. Even though these practices resonate with the listening to feelings that were first introduced in Chapter 3. Although Ambient listening is not directly addressed as a practice, participants were very much aware of the 'mix of atmosphere, interaction, stuff, happening, context, and sensations' that charged experiences of direct listening (see Bennett et al 2015: 13).

As a researcher who participated in the everyday routines of both organisations I had an involved role (for example: doing bits of advice work), but I also used my position to

create spaces to reflect upon experiences of working in these services that were felt by many, but not necessarily articulated in the same way as a practice of listening empathetically, or the dilemmas of listening with an interpreter. Ambience was addressed in an indirect way through the questions I posed: can you describe the environment you work in? The listening workshop was also a way of creating a space for collective deep listening in which participants could listen back and reflect upon the ambiences that they work within and know are important but are not codified into a particular practice.

## Choreographies of listening

This section will explore the architecture of each organisation alongside the ad hoc designs and trajectories of people passing through the different parts of the buildings. In both the Drop-in and the Advice Service people move through different micro-spaces and as they move, they adopt certain rhythms; they produce and transmit certain moods as they are touched and circulate feelings between others. Choreographies of listening is concerned with the polyrhythmic movements that are part of the wider ambiences that flow thorough and connect the different social and organisational spaces of the Advice Service and the Drop-in.

In the context of Ambient listening, a study of the choreographies of listening highlights how the trajectories of people contributes to understanding how people listen within such dynamic spaces and whose voices are heard and where. This section will begin by renot to the open plan office space as heard on Classical Reception via a narrative adapted from the listening diary.

## 5.6

Sitting in the office space prior to the morning appointments the Advice Service felt like it was starting to fall apart. I was sat at a bank of desks where the project manager was briefing volunteers on their morning appointments. Paul (one of the long-term volunteers) had agreed to let me observe his appointment, which was with a young man and his social worker who also consented to my presence. At the time of the

meeting, the young man was supported by the council because they were categorised as a 'vulnerable young person', but because of his age this period was coming to an end[31].

Until now, the young man was housed by the council, but due to their age (turning 18 years old meant that they would be supported by the council) they were going to have to apply for Section 95 asylum support. Transitioning from council services - from the category of 'vulnerable young person' to that of 'asylum-seeker' with no access to public funds - was not easy. There was also an additional weight pressing upon this appointment: what if the social worker expected this to be a straight forward process of applying for asylum support? Potentially disrupting the meeting or adding to the stress of a potentialy difficult meeting was the break down of the support systems so integral to the smooth running of the service.

Consistent heavy rainfall over the previous few weeks meant that the roof over the computer servers had collapsed. This meant that there was no internet or access to the online networks where the Advice Service kept documents (including the ASF1 form used to apply for Section 95 accommodation). The technologies that make the service cohere - usually a soft background noise of fans whirring and lights blinking behind closed doors - had suddenly shifted to the foreground.

Responding to this in my listening diary I recorded…

> 'Structuring this interaction was the ongoing chaos of the servers being down -
> so there were no phones; server access or internet. Some of the doors with
> [security] passes were even locked. Prior to the appointment, I clocked [Paul]
> doing some stretching, breathing things and I asked him what he was doing.
> [Paul] said it was Qigong - meditative breathing exercises - that [he] described
> as a spiritual and physical practice similar to Falun Gong'.
> (AS 13 02 2018)

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[31] Young unaccompanied asylum-seekers will be supported by their local council until they reach the age of 18 years old.

Qigong is a term that refers to practices of slow movement, meditation, and regulated breathing that are a key exercise in the Chinese religious and spiritual practice of Falun Gong. With the ongoing chaos of the server issue and the imminent appointment, it was unlikely that Paul would have entered a deep meditative state anytime soon; but the stretching and the breathing exercises demonstrate Paul's attempt to calm himself during a stressful time prior to what might be a difficult conversation. Listening to the appointment briefing from the project manager; anticipating the possible conflict and negotiating the social worker's expectations along with the technical issues were clearly felt by Paul in this intimate moment.

The Qigong breathing exercises and movement could be interpreted as an attempt to establish a calmer personal rhythm. A receptive state that could ride the waves of stress felt in the office that morning, so that the potential conflict and extra pressures in the office were not contagious and would not affect Paul's ability to listen during the appointment.

Breathing techniques play an important role in managing stress situations and are integral to diverse practices such as yoga and hypnobirthing[32]. Breathing is also a key element of Oliveros' notion of Deep listening, as she stresses that: 'we can change our breathing by attending to it. With awareness and practice we can breathe more deeply and this calms our mind and emotions' (2005: 23). In this excerpt, Paul is attending to his own breathing to counteract the wider stressful atmosphere that he is working within. He is listening with his whole body (Macpherson (2016), possibly attuning to the weight of the room in an effort to affect a different mood and rhythm to the office space. The office is a polyrhythmic space composed of the organisational and personal rhythms that intersect and transform one another and these rhythms affect the overall ambience of the space. There is a particular weight to the room and breathing deeply somehow makes this easier to deal with on a personal level.

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[32] During my partners pregnancy we took hypnobirthing classes together, which involved visualising a positive birth whilst practicing slow, calm breathing techniques.

Paul's calm breathing is a quiet moment where the personal and wider public feelings and structures mingle. In this sense, the extract demonstrates the visceral and embodied nature attuning to the ambience of a particular space; from this angle, the breathing and movement exercises should be understood as a personal choreography within organisational space. To get to grips with the office movement in more detail this section will now follow Paul's trajectory from the briefing to the 'goldfish bowl' appointment room that is adjacent to the office space.

### 5.7

Before the appointment began I asked Paul to introduce me to the young man and the social worker so that I could explain my role as a researcher before sitting-in and observing the appointment. Paul began by explaining what the Advice Service could assist the young man with, saying that the application for Section 95 could take weeks to be processed. During this introductory exchange I was sensitive to the 'client's' body language as he appeared tense and awkward.

In response to this observation I recorded the following in my listening diary after the event…

> 'What was most striking here was the client's body language - sat back in their chair with their arms crossed, covering their face occasionally, and holding up a shaking hand. They were also very red in the face, basically, they were showing signs of physical discomfort in the appointment room, and eventually, they had to leave before the end of the appointment, letting the [social worker] and [Paul] piece the ASF1 application together'.
> (AS 13 02 2018)

The anxiety levels that the young man was experiencing became more manifest in his facial expressions and body language as the appointment progressed making it impossible for him to participate in the conversation. He excused himself and left Paul and the social worker to carry on the meeting. After the young man had left, Paul had to go and speak with the project manager and during this time the social worker told

me a little bit more about the young man. She said that the young man was dealing with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and one of the symptoms of the medication they were prescribed made him very hot and uncomfortable. The social worker said that when they visited the young man he would usually have the windows to his flat open to let the fresh air circulate. Adding to this, the social worker also mentioned that the young man found situations that were out of his control very difficult. The rough transition from social services to asylum support could have easily triggered his anxieties. What the re-telling of this observation demonstrates is the quiet intensity of the Advice Service and how different rhythms and pressures co-exist and mingle.

Prior to the appointment, Paul sensed a potential conflict and knew that the meeting would be made more difficult because he wouldn't be able to access any forms or guidance on the PC, so tried to calm himself before the encounter. He then takes these sensations and feelings with him into the appointment; adding to an atmosphere charged by the young man's emotional state. These trajectories and emotional states affected how each person was able to listen during the appointment and this proved too much for the young man.

The choreographies of Paul and the young 'client' demonstrate the asymmetrical power dynamics of how people move through, dwell and are affected by the wider environment. In this instance, Paul actively uses the Qigong breathing exercises to manage the assumed stresses of the encounter; whereas the young man appears to be overcome by physical and mental discomfort possibly brought on by the the side effects of his medication and a sense of feeling out-of-control of what happens next with their support.

The narrative demonstrates that both Paul and the young man experience different spatio-temporalities of discomfort. When the young man left the appointment, the social worker and Paul completed a paper copy of the ASF1 form and Paul made a list of all the information that would be needed before the application could be sent off. The atmosphere of the appointment room affected the 'client's' personal situation so much

that they were unable to discuss the application and their absence meant that they could not make any informed decision during this process. It is also pertinent to note the presence of the researcher in this scenario and the unfolding ethics of observation. It wasn't until I had introduced myself and gained consent from the young man that his anxiety about the situation became clear (England 1994; Coddington 2017).

In terms of the sound space of the appointment, the young man was not personally heard or listened to as he was represented by the social worker in the meeting. If we think about this scenario in terms of an audible citizenship, in which the right to speak and be heard is negotiated, then the weighty ambience of the appointment room contributed to the affective economy of the situation in which the young man was not heard.

So far, the discussion has focused on how people move through and respond to the different environments of the Advice Service. The next part of this section will concentrate on the Drop-in to discuss some of the ad hoc designs of the spaces used and what this reveals about who has the right to take up audible space within each organisation.

5.8

To enter the main hall of the Drop-in you have to pass through two sets of doors, the second of which opens out onto an area that Penny calls the log-jam. If you were to stand in the logjam facing out into the main hall, the advice office and the kitchen would be to the left of you and to the right is the reception table where volunteers welcome those who come to the Drop-in; registering them as they arrive. The log-jam is a gauntlet, especially at busier times when people have to pass through to enter or leave. It's supposed to be a transitory space: people sign-in at the reception desk and ask questions; they stop for a moment but they are meant to keep moving. In the previous discussion of *Job Centre Listening*, the presence of certain lingering figures could be heard in the recording and it is the 'log-jam' where they usually wait.

One morning I observed an advice session with Salma that took place in one of the improvised spaces at the back of the main hall. After the advice session I walked with Salma across the hall towards the advice office. In my listening diary I recorded the following reflections about what occurred on this short walk…

> '[We] walked from the back of the room to the front office [and] about 6-7 people came up to [Salma] and some of them were audibly annoyed and remonstrating. Today people were particularly forward about having to wait, and I can understand this: people find themselves waiting a long time to be heard [especially] when they come early. Some say that they have waited since 6…at one point when we were in the office, [Salma] said; "It's like a riot!"…the noise and the constant pressure from people, all the mingling and people [taking it upon] themselves [to be heard] perhaps it shows that the system isn't really working for this amount of people?'
> (AS Ref Listening Diary 20).

Salma's exclamation, that the Drop-in was 'like a riot', demonstrates the sonic intensity of the main hall - in particular the walk from the back of the hall towards the advice office where she had to pass through the gauntlet of the log-jam. The intensity of the log-jam was also a recurring theme of conversation between volunteers who were tasked with managing the flow of people in-and-out of the main hall. An intensity that was partly generated by the number of people who stood outside the advice office and how their voices, bodies and contributing sounds and movements (doors slamming; people passing through) were amplified by the lower ceiling. The ceiling is a hard plastered surface and combined with the wooden floor it creates very vibrant acoustics that don't absorb sound.    Instead of a frictionless thoroughfare the 'log-jam' was an arrhythmic space that people lingered in. From the perspective of the Drop-in, it was a problem to be solved.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, Leni (the volunteer coordinator), marked out an 'X' on the floor between the reception table and the advice office. Now, because of this intervention, the 'log-jam' wasn't just an audible 'riot' that erupted during busy times or

where people lingered who hadn't had their queries attended to that day. The 'log-jam' existed as a semi-permanent pictogram. The duct taped 'X' was meant to function in the same way as similar markings do in institutional buildings such as hospitals that mark out space in doorways to inform visitors where they can't smoke, or the yellow line on a train station platform that passengers are instructed to stand behind when the train is approaching.

Marking the log-jam with the 'X' represents one tactic employed by the Drop-in staff to manage the riotous noise of the main social space; encouraging people to move through rather than linger. Such solutions for managing micro-spaces is reminiscent of David Bissell's (2009) research on the conceptualisation of differently mobile passengers within UK train stations. Bissell states that 'through modelling and simulation, architects and designers are aware that different passengers use areas of the station in different ways. Indeed, certain spaces are designed to be traversed in manifold ways, to facilitate or restrict passenger flows (Bissell 2009: 183; see also Markus 1993). Busy transport hubs such as Newcastle station, which was one of the focuses of Bissell's study, are the product of complex and expert planning on a far larger infrastructural scale than the Drop-in. However, the duct-tape 'X' at the entrance of the main hall is a visible marker of 'space-syntax' (Hillier and Hanson 1984) that 'are used by designers to predict differential […] movements on the basis of choices' (Bissell 2009: 183). Thus it is comparable to the pictograms and other signs that proliferate in public spaces such as railway stations.

It is clear that not all people who visit the organisations will feel a general sense of inclusion, nor will they want to participate. The ambience of the Drop-in or the Advice Service can be tense and can be heard as a struggle at times, but what can be felt is an ambience that reflects a counterpublic space that challenges the adversarial and suspicious listening state and the pervading hostile environment.

Playing & screaming

This section will reflect on the multi-dimensional nature of Ambient listening by listening again to  the audio recordings of interviews in order to tune-in to their peripheral sounds. To begin, I would like to turn to an interview conducted with Saaf, a volunteer at the Drop-in and an asylum-seeker, which was recorded in one of the ad hoc advice spaces at the back of the main hall. Unlike *Job Centre Listening*, the recording does not contain the busy sounds of people tidying up or the hold music from the Job Centre; the sound space is sparser, a conversation can be heard at the otherside of the hall and then at a further distance what sounds like an upset child[33].

Babies and young children (usually, this means those who are not yet at school), are a regular audible presence in the Drop-in and as the interviews and participant observation took place there, they are an audible presence at the periphery of some of my recordings. Hearing the sound of children is an ever present and conflicting sonic presence: as Awert stated earlier in this chapter -  the sound of children "playing and screaming" can disrupt an advice session. The sounds of children are also essential to the familial atmosphere that is valued by Salma when she stated that: "it's like we are a family [...] because we know a lot of things about the client, we know their life […] we know their children" (DI 5). This section will offer some reflections on listening to the multi-dimensional sound spaces of interview recordings to discuss how the voices and sounds of children contribute to the sonic ambience of the Drop-in[34].

## 5.9

Penny's interview has 3 separate audio files that were written up as a single transcript. Listening again to the end of the first recording the flow of our conversation is interrupted, this is made clear when Penny says…

> 'oh, here we go!…

---

[33] This section and the sounds that it attunes to gained in significance since my fieldwork finished. In July, my daughter was born and since then I have noticed how her voice and lungs have grown in power and articulation. The tone of a child's cry seems to pierce the air in a way that draws your attention to it. Even when it is heard through a wall or door. In the context of the Drop-in, the presence of children playing and screaming in the distance is not out of place, but this might be heard and felt differently in other public spaces, such as: during a long train journey.

[34] For a more detailed discussion of sound, play and children, see Duffy (2013 & 2016).

*[sound of feet on stairs, a cry getting louder until the door bursts open]…'*

It was the school holidays and the interruption came from Penny's son who was downstairs in the main hall where an Easter play-scheme was taking place. The play-scheme had taken over from the regular Drop-in, which always closes during the school holidays. Myself and Penny were in the computer room on the first floor, which overlooks the main hall; the room can be accessed by a flight of stairs in the corridor leading to the main hall. Also, the PC room has a large glass window, from which you can look down into the hall. The window makes the sounds below much more present than if it was just a brick wall.

As an aside in the transcript, I briefly described the sonic environment…

'it's the Easter break […] what can be heard in the background to the interview is the sound of children's voices - not one distinct [from another] but like that of hearing a school [playground] at a distance: all voices quite high in register'.

Listening back to the recording, I don't recall any annoyance at this interruption, moreover: the social sounds of the children playing in the background sound pleasant to my ears as I listen back. They knit the interview into a wider social ongoingness, as the spaces are adapted and opened up to the different needs of the community. It feels apt that the interview should take place in such a surrounding sonority.

As Penny's son had interrupted the interview, I turned off the recorder. He was upset because he had an altercation with another child and wanted his Mum to comfort him. A focus on the playing and screaming of children is a reminder that the Drop-in is a safe and welcoming place for children and families; children's play and the conflicts that ensue contribute to the diverse and challenging 'familial' atmosphere that Salma associates with the Drop-in. More importantly, although attendees like Awert may disagree, it is clear that children have the right to take up sound space too. The

introduction of the next extract from my listening diary aims to further understand the audibility children and why this is of significance to the ambience of each organisation.

## 5.10

In the queue for lunch I struck up a conversation with the woman next to me; she appeared to be in a particularly good mood. This was the first time I had spoken with the woman and she opened up about why she was so happy immediately. She was in a positive mood because she had come to the Drop-in with an ongoing issue with her Universal Credit claim, which Penny and Salma had been able to assist her with. Previously, the woman had attended her local Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB); she said that the CAB had only helped her with parts of her predicament, but Salma and Penny had been able to listen to her and assist with the whole of her problem. As this was only a fleeting encounter, I did not want to delve into the detail of her meeting as this could touch upon emotional terrain in the public space of the lunch queue. However, it is important to note that this was one of the first times that a 'client' of the Drop-in had unexpectedly touched upon the listening practices of the advice workers. As the previous two chapters have focused on Dialogic listening encounter, this section will explore the ambience of this encounter, weaving what was said into a wider field of incidental sounds and activities (adapted from AS 21 09 2017).

The woman had brought her daughter (who was around 3-4 years old) with her to the Drop-in; I had noticed her intermittently during the morning, playing with a boy of about her age in the main hall. Talking about her daughter, the woman said that she is always really happy to come to the Drop-in; so much so that the woman said her daughter refers to the Drop-in fondly as her 'school'. In the listening diary I wrote the following response to this chance meeting…

> 'it brings up some other important issues: a child friendly space; she is able to bring her child here, and she is able to play freely, no doubt annoying some people, but this very simple inclusion is something that is missing from some other services'.
> (adapted from AS 21 09 2017)

Describing the Drop-in as a child friendly space connects with the Drop-in's overall aim of establishing a welcoming space for all. In this extract, what I have described as the 'free play' of the children refers to parent supervised activities. During the day, children will interact with each other or play individual games, creating a play-scape as they weave in-and-out of the tables, chairs and the thoroughfares of the main hall. This can be a nuisance to some; as noticed by the Drop-in where notices were put up to ask parent's to supervise their children more carefully, moderating the noise they can make. As well as another example of the ad hoc ways in which the Drop-in space is designed and managed, the inclusion/exclusion of children in the general ambience of the Drop-in leads to an important question: what other forms of inclusion/exclusion is the sound of children a symptom of?

5.11

To tackle this question, I want to introduce the Gateway Resettlement Language Project, which is an English language learning programme run by Refugee Action. Refugee Action works with refugees who come to the UK through the Gateway Resettlement and Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. Refugees who come to live in the UK via this scheme are part of what the UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) calls the Gateway Protection Programme, which works in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to grant 750 refugees the right to settle in the UK each year (see Gov UK 2019). The Gateway Resettlement Language Project has trialled innovative ways for refugees to learn English through the sharing of other skills such as cooking and baking (Newton-Ward 2019).

In an overview of the project, one of the coordinators, Rachel Newton-Ward, describes the benefits of the approach developed by the project using participant narratives. These reflections focus on how learning English in a social setting gave the participants confidence and alleviated the 'loneliness' experienced as refugees new to life in the UK. A feeling summarised by Newton-Ward as…

'Loneliness can particularly affect women who are resettled with their children or on their own. Some women live in remote areas and don't have an opportunity to interact with others. Some are unable to attend English classes due to lack of childcare options. There is a hidden aspect of loneliness that we don't always see and people don't always tell us about'
(Ward-Newton 2019).

The Drop-in is not part of this project but it does run English language classes. It is these classes that Saaf attends and which gave him the impetus to leave the quietness of his home where he didn't speak to anyone and felt a similar sense of isolation. What is also important in the above statement is how essential child care is as it makes the difference between those who have children (and no child care options) attending or not attending classes and restricting who has access to certain forms of English language tuition. In response to the need for child support, the Drop-in has a crèche so that parent's attending the Drop-in alone with young children are able to go to the English classes.

Earlier in this chapter, Salma used 'family' to describe the relationships formed and the atmosphere of the Drop-in. The use of the familial is not bound by any direct blood relation or an unbending idealised tradition, but is instead defined as a reflective openness that is part of the design of the service. Families are encouraged to attend with their children and the sound of them free-wheeling around the main hall is part of an inclusive ambience; even if their activities and audibility can also negatively impact other people's experience. The sound of the children is a reminder of the presence of their carers (usually single women) who are attending the English class in another part of the building. Children playing can be heard at a distance in many of the interview recordings and the listening diary and by attending to them it is possible to understand the complex texture of the ambience of the Drop-in and what the presence of the children means with regards to who has the right to take up sound space in the Drop-in.

Children have a right to play and build relationships with their peers and their parents have a right to learn English and feel more embedded and in control of their own lives. Learning English leads to an ability to read utility bills and go to the supermarket and make ordinary decisions without any confusion over a particular purchase on a receipt. The ambience of the Drop-in represents the busy-ness of being ordinary; of people learning, developing friendships and volunteering in ways that escape the circumscribed agency of the asylum-seeker. Despite the importance of providing a crèche and English classes, the latter of which are staffed by a dedicated team of volunteers. Both the Drop-in and the Advice Service rely on volunteers to run their services and despite the obvious necessity of these services, it presents a dilemma as they can be seen to justify the state's refusal to provide these services. Although I frame these acts within a micro-politics that challenge the wider hostile environment it is important to reflect on how far these activities nudge the debilitating power dynamics of the state.

The use of the familial is reminiscent of discussions within queer theory about alternate models for the family structure that exceed heteronormative patriarchy. In *The Argonauts*, Maggie Nelson writes about having a child with their F-M trans-partner, posing the question: 'when or how do new kinship systems mimic older nuclear-family arrangements and when or how do they radically re-contextualise them in a way that constitutes a re-thinking of kinship? (2015: 16). Although queer kinship relations do not map directly onto the Drop-in, the term kinship is more appropriate to describing the relationships that are formed and contested in the Drop-in. New forms of kinship are developed that challenge an asylum regime that disperses asylum-seekers to parts of the UK where they may have no connections and provides them with support outside the welfare system available to citizens. Organisations like the Drop-in and the Advice Service might be semi-institutional in the sense that they act as an intermediary between the asylum-seekers and the Home Office but they are also much more than an empathetic-bureaucratic channel between asylum-seekers and the Home office in the UK asylum regime. The informal, familial soundscape is the relational fabric of the Drop-in; hearing the playing and screaming of children may be irritating to some, but it

is part of an experimental counterpublic that feels and sounds different to more institutional spaces.

This section has focused on the ambient textures of the Drop-in, meaning that the Advice Service has been conspicuous in its absence. Concentrating on the Drop-in does not mean that the sounds of children are not part of the sonic environment of the Advice Service; they are welcome to accompany their parents to appointments, but because of the nature of the service there is less room for them to play. Their activities are confined to the small office spaces used for advice sessions and their behaviour and movement is closely monitored and controlled by their parents. Also, due to the more formal separation of activities in the Advice Service, the interviews took place in relatively quiet spaces and there was very little interference. What was more prominent was the noise of the main street outside and the occasional bell from the church across the street. Focussing on the Drop-in for this section does not mean that the Advice Service is without ambience but the distinctions about who or what contributes to the sound space of the organisation is much more formally defined. Even though similar power dynamics are at play in the Drop-in, its unpredictable, raucous sound space represents the on-going ordinary negotiations of public space in which asylum-seekers and refugees have an integral part to play.

## 5.12

This project began when I lived in Manchester but in the summer before I began to write-up, I moved back to Glasgow. At the same time as completing my thesis I also volunteer at another refugee and asylum-seeker organisation. Thinking about the ambience of familial/kinship sounds gained another layer of significance through my involvement with the different activities of this new organisation. This organisation runs a Drop-in providing practical support, but it is also involved in organising political campaigns around asylum issues. As the organisation is completely volunteer-run, when there are events such as community meals, film screenings or campaign meetings a collective of regular volunteers organises free child care for those that need it.

The collective responsibility of child care is incredibly important because without it - just like with the English classes - those with children might not be able to participate in the event. At the periphery of more visible and audible 'Political' events is a caring labor and a keen ear that listens to the needs of the wider collective of people that are part of this community. Moreover, it is important that this caring labor is not simply re-producing the gender-norms of child care; where the female volunteers provide support for the children and the men get on with the real 'Political' business. It requires a further collective responsibility to listen to each other in order to ensure that people can contribute in a way that makes them feel comfortable and that allows access to all that want to contribute.

Recalling one film screening I attended in Glasgow; the area for children was in a separate room to the film screening and the couple of times that the door opened, a cacophony of voices and sounds escaped from the room. At the end of the screening when there was time for questions and the room was relatively silent, a man stood up and said he didn't want to ask any questions, instead, he wanted to sing a song in his own language that the film had reminded him of. Everyone in the room agreed, and the man proceeded to sing unaccompanied. The song was the final contribution and everyone clapped the man's performance. Knitted into a film and discussion about detention centres were the sounds of children playing, awkward silence, cups of tea and an improvised song that affectively resonated with the grainy video images of protest we witnessed on the screen. A micro-politics of Deep listening that includes reflective caring labor contributes to the ambience of the ordinary ongoingness of a community and the possible counter publics that are negotiated in these events.

Conclusion

Both Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 were suffused with the ambience of each organisation but were focused on Dialogic listening. This chapter shifted the focus from Dialogical listening in order to attune to a wider atmosphere of sounds, architecture, voices, materials and rhythms.

Unlike Empathetic and Bureaucratic listening, Ambient listening is not a skill that is practiced on a daily basis by research participants who listen directly to their interlocutors. However, through group listening workshops, participants could reflect on ambient audio recordings of their everyday work environments in order to discuss how they felt about the spaces they inhabit. The workshops were an important method as they brought a more participatory way of listening with others away from the time pressures of advice work. Although the workshops only took place at the Drop-in, they were an important experiment in collective listening that demonstrated the possibilities of reflecting on the wider sonic environment and the insight provided by the workshops led to a more considered understanding of the affective economies that circulate around what is said and heard.

Combined with the insights from interviews and informal conversation, the listening workshops contributed to a description of the sonic environment of the Drop-in - its echo-y sounds and how this amplifies and intensifies particular micro-spaces and temporalities such as the 'log-jam'. Following Lefebvre's understanding that; 'the everyday reveals itself to be a polyrhythmia from the first listening' (2004:16), attuning to the rhythms, architecture and atmospheric intensities of such spaces opened up to a discussion about the 'affective economy' of listening (Ahmed 2004). The findings of this chapter suggest that ambience is not just an inert background as it charges encounters and constitutes how we listen across difference. Moreover, by attuning to the ambient surrounds, it is possible to understand who has a right to contribute to the sonic environment of both organisations. For example: the Advice Service is a more tightly choreographed space and the voices of asylum-seeker client's are heard within very specific contexts such as the appointment rooms. The main hall of the Drop-in is much more raucous sounding, where different voices and sounds mix to form a more dissonant environment. Therefore, the ambient reveals where voices are concentrated and how they are marshalled in the design of the organisational space.

What Ambient listening contributes to this thesis is a practice of attuning to more diffuse dynamics of audible citizenship. As Berlant (2011) emphasises, the ambient is 'a mode of belonging' where certain people feel welcomed and a possibility exists for

developing forms of community and kinship. However, Ambient listening involves attuning to the complex weave of textures, sounds, voices, and materials that can create affective barriers, such as what occurred in the 'handbag incident', where the Nigerian woman felt discriminated against because she didn't speak Arabic. By listening to the ambient, it is possible to understand 'collective feelings' and 'public moods' that are composed in both organisations and how these wider ambiences shift and merge to co-constitute affective attachments and barriers within the different micro-spaces of each organisation.

In terms of a micro-politics of Deep listening, the ambience of the public sphere of both organisations is important as the organisations are imbricated within the asylum regime and the wider hostile environment towards refugees and asylum-seekers. By reflecting on the feelings and moods that circulate within both organisations it is possible to better understand and facilitate how more hopeful or joyful community spaces can be established in order to challenge the suspicion and disbelief of the listening state.

At the Advice Service this can be heard in the busy ambience of a bureaucracy that collaborates with asylum-seeker client's; at the Drop-in it is heard in the meld of activities such as choir practice or the playing and screaming of children. Both are sonic events that remind the listener that these different service structures are in place and allow single-parents to attend English classes. If the sound of children were not audible within the Drop-in then this could suggest that there is no child care and those women eager to learn English and with no other place to go might not come to the service. Or find anywhere else to accommodate their needs as parents. The sense of belonging and participation would be restricted and this would be reflected in what is not present in the ambience of the main hall.

Moreover, the different resonating voices and bodies that pass through and touch in these spaces remind us that people are affected differently and that conflict or dissonance may arise, but such conflict is part of any understanding of community or citizenship. What this chapter contributes is a sense of the importance of attuning to the ambience, but that the ambience is never harmonious. Instead, it is an echoing and

ephemeral membrane of a space that echoes with the everyday struggles to compose public spaces that refugees and asylum-seekers feel that they have a place in and a sense of investment so they can contribute to the life of each organisation. Ambiences imbue communicative interaction and contribute to how they unfold, attuning to how they do so is part of the struggle to create reflective shared spaces that challenge the debilitating norms of audibility of the wider public sphere and the listening state.

Before the overall conclusion addresses the four main contributions of this thesis, the following interlude will introduce the second 'Deep Listening Piece' from Pauline Oliveros (2005). *Rhythms* is a performative example of the Deep listening that this thesis has elaborated as it encourages the listener to reflect on their own listening position and how they are situated within a wider sonic environment. In other words: it is a reflective exercise that takes stock of the multi-dimensional sonic environment and creates a space in which to listen to the inter-related dynamics that this thesis has explored. It also invites the listener to be present; to be in the present at the moment you are listening. Please read the exercise and take 5-10 minutes to listen before turning over to the conclusion.

*Rhythms* (1996)

What is the meter/tempo of your normal walk?

How often do you blink?

What is the current tempo of your breathing?

What is the current tempo of your heart rate?

What other rhythms do you hear if you listen?

What is your relationship to all of the rhythms that you perceive at once?

(Oliveros 2005: 48)

Conclusion:
Listening otherwise

'The future is dark, with a darkness as much of the womb as the grave.'
Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*.

This thesis has explored the listening cultures of two refugee and asylum-seeker organisations anonymised as the Advice Service and the Drop-in. It has involved a sonic ethnographic enquiry that engages with everyday encounters and ordinary moments of co-existence in order to explore how a micro-politics of Deep listening disrupts the norms of audibility defined by the nation-state and the wider hostile environment. Doing so, involved engaging with how each organisation is imbricated in the asylum regime and how individuals, however unwittingly, can end up listening and speaking like the state.

What this thesis has advanced is a framework for elucidating a micro-politics that focuses on the inter-woven nature of intimate encounters and wider structures of power to highlight how more audible and visible relations impinge upon and are resisted within the everyday spaces of asylum-seeker and refugee services. Focusing on the present state of the asylum regime and how the Advice Service and Drop-in act as essential contact points providing advice, advocacy and safe, social spaces within a wider hostile environment also involves exploring the present and future hope and possibility contained within these spaces. I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that we live in increasingly dark times, there is more than enough potential in our present for a different kind of future for the reception of migrants and citizenship that is not defined by a jingoistic ethno-nationalism.

This conclusion will present four contributions that have been advanced within this thesis via a discussion of the conceptual-methodological framework of Deep listening in relation to the empirical findings of the Empathetic, Bureaucratic and Ambient listening chapters.

*1) The affective economy of Deep listening*

Deep listening has been articulated as a conceptual-methodological framework to understand listening as a sensuous, intersubjective micro-political act. One that strives towards a critical openness to what is said and heard and that is attuned to the affective capacities of the sonic environment. Chapter 1 began by engaging with Les Back's (2007) outline for a sociology of the ear and Susan Bickford's (1996) concept of listening as an essential act of citizenship. One that is based on the intersubjective nature of communication that takes the other seriously whilst reflecting on how we listen across difference. A micro-politics of listening involves an ongoing process of learning and unlearning ways of listening where we come to terms with the ways that our listening responses demonstrate how differently situated bodies can affect and be affected. Moreover, it involves 'specific places, groups and practices and what happens in the attempt to create a shared responsibility towards changing the roles of speakers to listeners and to demand to be heard on different terms' (Bassel 2017: 8).

In consideration of the micro-politics of listening, the conceptual advances this thesis presents is a consideration of how the sonic environment is co-constituted by communicative interaction. A dimension of listening that felt under-explored in Bickford's (1996) theory of listening as an act of citizenship. Although Bickford (1996) is a key influence on my understanding of the political possibilities of listening, my articulation of Deep listening contributes to this scholarship by drawing together both Back (2007) and Pauline Oliveros' (2005) conceptions of Deep listening in order to explore the multi-dimensional dynamics of the sonic environment. As has been demonstrated across this thesis: tackling this complex dynamic requires a listening attuned to acts of face-to-face interaction; the echos of voices; sonic textures and the particular atmospheres that compose everyday spaces.

The inter-disciplinary approach to understanding the micro-politics of Deep listening is innovative because it works across the boundaries of different disciplines - including political and sonic geography, sociology and sound studies - in order to stage a critical enquiry into listening with the everyday geographic spaces of refugee and asylum-seeker services. One of the most significant advances of this inter-disciplinary project is the articulation of the 'affective economies' of listening (Ahmed 2004). Sara Ahmed's

development of this concept has been crucial for understanding how emotions circulate within public spaces to 'align individuals with communities - or bodily space with social space - through the very intensity of their attachments' (2004: 119). My contribution to this literature is to outline a politics of listening across difference in everyday semi-institutional spaces. It is an approach that contributes to the affective economies of asylum geographies (Darling 2014; Gill 2016) and work within cultural geographies that focus on atmospheres (Anderson 2009) as well as sound (Gallagher et al 2017).

Additionally, as this thesis has noted, Back's (2007) work on Deep listening has been influential on geographic approaches (Askins 2015; Bennett et al 2014; Darling 2011). What my thesis develops as a unique contribution is a rigorous understanding of listening as a concept and practice that has culminated in open definitions of listening as a method and how listening is practiced within semi-institutional spaces such as refugee and asylum-seeker organisations. Moreover, the conceptual-methodological framework of Deep listening should be understood as an open set of ideas and practices that can be adapted to a wide range of geographic research settings. In particular, a sonic ethnographic approach could be adopted to explore other semi-institutional spaces or autonomous spaces that provide advocacy for marginalised groups of people (like homelessness advocacy).

*2) The listening state*

*Chapter 4* developed an understanding of the listening state by engaging with legal studies scholarship that focuses on how the state listens (or is supposed to listen) in the legal process of the adjudication of asylum applications (see Graig & Gramling 2017). What this thesis contributes to the advancement of the listening state is translating the concept to the everyday geographies of refugee and asylum-seeker services in order to understand how the state listens via the bureaucratic architecture of the asylum regime.

Expanding the concept of the listening state beyond the court room provides a unique analysis for the practice of Bureaucratic listening. One of the significant investigations in Chapter 4 was the outline of how the nation-state listens adversarially and with suspicion to refugees and asylum-seekers and how such listening events are experienced via the disembodied voices of telephone calls to the Home Office as well as emails and letters. It advances the notion of listening as a networked activity and also, how the asylum regime imbued the routine interactions of both organisations in order to discuss how people can listen like the state. This was then posed as a central ethical and political dilemma faced by both organisations.

Across Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, more direct forms of Deep listening encounters are placed within a wider assemblage of different listening acts that link the intimate scale of the Advice Service and the Drop-in to a wider geographical network. Outlining listening as an affective network makes an innovative contribution to asylum geographies (Burridge & Gill 2016; Darling 2011; Webber 2010) because it provides a sonic exploration of how the state comes to 'educate our senses' (Back 2011). One of the innovative contributions of extending the concept of the listening state beyond the legal context set out by Craig and Gramling (2017) is to better understand how state practices inform encounters across difference within everyday spaces. This is key because it extends the listening state to consider the everyday geographies of refugee and asylum-seeker services and the world-making capacities of listening within these spaces. It is a cultural geographical approach to 'critical asylum geography' (see Gill 2010) that understands that the state work on intimate levels, imbuing mundane and routine practices that are not usually considered political.

For example: in Chapter 4, the appointments in the Advice Service to complete applications for asylum-seeker financial assistance and accommodation are defined by a certain ritual of telling and listening. One where the asylum-seeker applicant has to carry the burden of truth and is listened to with suspicion by the state. In these appointments, the Home Office defines the terms of engagement through the application process where the state acts as a monoglot listener that requires that all evidence is translated into English. What this thesis demonstrates is that the current

asylum regime is completely inadequate and that it fails to listen to the claims and narratives of asylum-seekers because it simplifies complex, trans-national identities. Moreover, both the Advice Service and the Drop-in listen through state apparatus but they also practice a counter-bureaucracy that is open to uncertainty and collaborates with the other who is seeking refuge in a way that doesn't demand the immediate assimilation of the monoglot listening state. In terms of citizenship, listening against the grain of the state in this way is a prosaic rupturing of the contingencies of the state that Engin Isin refers to as the 'habitus, practice, conduct, discipline and routine' (2009: 379).

The listening state could be applied in a much more expansive geographic research project; for example, one that explores the everyday geographies of the listening state in other states. This would be a comparative study that would gain a valuable insight into different listening states and the more local listening cultures of the organisations that work with asylum-seekers in these countries. Within this future project, listening workshops could be introduced so that practitioners and refugees and asylum-seekers could reflect on the listening state and how it  can be challenged, creating wider networks of solidarity. By advancing the concept of the listening state in a wider reaching sonic ethnography it would be possible to explore how micro-political acts are part of a wider network of solidarity and support and help to build international communities of radical care and resistance beyond the borders of a single nation state.

*3) Audible citizenship*

The concept of audible citizenship offers an important contribution to citizenship studies and towards scholarship and activism that attempts to escape the confines of belonging shaped by the nation-state (Nyers 2006; Staeheli et al 2012). Chapter 3 explored informal moments of encounter where relationships are formed, breakdown and are sometimes repaired. What this chapter highlighted was the ethical and political capacities of listening for relating to others in a way that challenges the pre-defined positions of the caring and the cared for. The findings in this chapter resonate with established geographic research that focuses on the contested politics of care (Darling

2011; Parr 2000) and intimate geographies of being together (Askins 2015). Audible citizenship should be understood within the context of 'ordinary citizenship' where small actions, challenges and experiments give rise to various forms of contact and engagement that have the potential to nudge established patterns of control and anticipate new political acts (Staeheli et al 2012: 630). What audible citizenship contributes to existing scholarship within citizenship studies and the everyday geographies of refugee and asylum-seeker services is a further attunement to the affective motion of listening in dynamic and contested spaces. Those that are composed of different voices, languages, architectures, echos and intensities through which people negotiate their own agency beyond the distinctions of active citizen worker/volunteer and the passive refugee/asylum-seeker (see Malkki 1996).

Part of developing the concept and practice of audible citizenship is the discussion of listening as a micro-political act. Audible citizenship involves negotiating the position of listeners and speakers and whose voices matter or have a right to take up public space. Recognising the contentions in spaces such as the Drop-in and the Advice Service and how social frictions and power dynamics are negotiated is important to understanding acts of audible citizenship, as it is through such small encounters that the contours of a community are negotiated (see Staeheli 2008). Both organisations strive to create a safe space for refugees and asylum-seekers whilst acknowledging complex negotiations that this involves. This is very different from the hostility fostered by the Home Office because it encourages people to negotiate their differences and problems rather than persecute others or hear them as suspicious persons that need to be dealt with. Audible citizenship is negotiated in such spaces where disagreements and frictions are revealed and asylum-seeker and refugee attendees can be trusted as members of an open and changing community to negotiate these differences. In this way, asylum-seekers and refugees *escape* the limited horizons of a subjectivity defined by passive victimhood as they practice a complicated belonging in hospitable spaces (Nyers 2015).

Audible citizenship advances research that focuses on how forms of citizenship and community are negotiated and the complex weave of emotions, encounters and

ambiences that public space is composed of. Social frictions shouldn't be shut down or ignored but considered and attuned to as they are part of a counterpublic in which refugee and asylum-seeker participants shouldn't just be grateful for, but should be actively involved in helping to run and shape them if they want to.

Audible citizenship is also concerned with the sonic environment. In Chapter 5, the sonic environment is explored as a relational tissue, connecting us with others as well as the materials and things that resonate and echo in our everyday lives. It is through these concerns that this thesis advances a critical meeting point between research within sonic and listening geographies (Bennett 2014; Kanngieser 2012) and political geography (Gill 2010; Darling 2014)  and citizenship studies (Staeheli 2012). Key to this intervention is an affective dimension in terms of dealing with the dissonant ambiences of shared spaces. It is not the intention of the thesis to advocate for the designing of a 'perfect' organisational ambience. The unpredictable nature of sound and the diverse agencies of each organisation would make this an impossible task. However, it is important to conclude that an organisational ambience is tempestuous and always in-process and that a community atmosphere involves negotiating the different feelings and emotions that circulate within the lively social spaces of organisations such as the Drop-in. Moreover, this thesis encourages the structures that can be put in place in order to reflect upon (un)harmonious encounters more productively. It is only by attuning to the different energies within a public ambience that open and regenerative modes belonging can be fostered; it is such spaces that generate the hope and possibility for a future that challenges the debilitating relationship of the hostile environment and the asylum regime.

*4) Learning to listen*

In order to explore the inter-related dimensions and networks of listening this project developed an innovative research design that took the form of a sonic ethnography. This approach was distilled into three inter-related listening practices that informed my approach to established ethnographic methods, such as participant-observation and semi-structured interviews  - and more experimental methods such as audio recording (see chapter 2).

The three listening practices developed across this thesis are: Dialogic listening, which focuses on verbal and non-verbal communication and how it charged by the wider sonic environment in which it unfolds. The ambient suffuses all listening experience and Ambient listening extends the 'affective economy' (Ahmed 2004) of listening to explore the multidimensional scales of the sonic environment. Layered listening involves listening again to the material collected during the research period to explore how such a process of re-visiting and immersing yourself in  audio recordings of interviews and environments; notes and auto-ethnographic reflections, involves grappling with the ethics of representing the voices of others and dealing with the significance of the incidental, minor moments that are recorded.

Formalising these practices of listening led to another significant development that took the shape of the listening researcher's tripartite identity as researcher-volunteer-friend. I volunteered at the organisations prior to undertaking this research project that involved a 10-month period of 'fieldwork'. Participating in the life of both organisations over an extended period of time led me to reflect on the complex ethical identity of the researcher who listens across a tripartite register, where the researcher's identity is shifting and not always clear cut. In a more structured interview, the dynamics between the interviewer and interviewee are more obviously defined, but as a researcher-participant I found myself in more social situations; especially in the time I spent volunteering in the Drop-in.

As an ally of post-colonial, feminist approaches to ethnography (see Coddington 2017), the tripartite identity develops a method of listening across these different identities in order to reflect upon the process of learning and unlearning ways of listening across

difference. As a white, male researcher with British citizenship, it was (and still is) important to check my privilege and recognise the limits of my ability to listen to others and not to gloss over the frictions that are generated between the researcher and researched. Listening as a researcher always involves negotiating uncomfortable encounters that can shift in tone and feeling across a single encounter. Deep listening should be taken as an unfinished guide to be built upon and interpreted in different research scenarios as it can advance ethical engagement in the messy realities of ethnographic research practice (see Law & Urry 2004).

Although this thesis used more traditional methods as part of a sonic ethnography, it has done so in a way that opens up the interview as a sensuous encounter. In Chapter 5, there was a greater focus on the incidental sounds and noises that can be heard on an interview recording and the chapter discussed the significance of minor events such as the buzzing interference of phone signal, or the ambient sound of the interview room and any interruptions that occurred. The framework of Deep listening aims to develop a form of listening that is attuned to the motion of emotion and how echos, architectures and materials affect and charge intersubjective communication.

Complimentary to the scholarly contributions made by this thesis, it is my contention that the methods developed can also feedback into the practices of the two organisations. Furthermore, these practices can also be developed outwith the context of refugee and asylum-seeker services to conduct sonic ethnography in different research locations. For example, the group listening workshops could be used to establish a regular, reflective space within each organisation. Presently, the Drop-in does have a forum in which volunteers can talk about their involvement in the service but this happens once a year. A regular series of listening workshops attended by staff, volunteers and refugee and asylum-seeker attendees could be used as a forum to talk about the work and environment of the organisation. Such a workshop could involve uncomfortable conversations about who is and isn't listened to and these conversations could lead to a discussion of any affective barriers that exist within the Drop-in that limit attendees participation.

The thesis has introduced three audio recordings and staged interludes with 'Deep Listening Pieces' (Oliveros 2005) in order to provide space for the reader to engage as a listener. This approach resonates with Back's (2012) development of the term 'Live Sociology', through which he calls for a critique of conventional paper forms of publishing where academic legitimacy is measured in journal papers and monographs. Instead, Back and Puwar (2012) argue for 'a more literary sensibility inside the research vocation but also for the extensions of sociological form through the embrace of multi-media (sound, image and text) (2012: 28). In developing Deep listening as a conceptual-methodological framework, this thesis provides significant scope for these wider research aims in expanding listening as a method within geographical scholarship and the wider network of social science research.

To conclude, I would like to address the Rebecca Solnit quote at the beginning of this conclusion. An apt quote for our political moment as a right wing Conservative Party has won a majority in the UK in an election that offered a stark choice between disaster capitalism and socialism. The Deep listening advocated for in this thesis may focus on everyday encounters but these scales are finely tuned with wider geo-political power dynamics. Hope and the possibility of a different future where migrants (of all kinds) are not used as scapegoats is present within such vital services and social spaces. They are part of a network that expands beyond Greater Manchester to the rest of the UK; standing in solidarity with refugee and asylum-seekers in the face of a hostile ruling class. Could such spaces become future listening posts and spaces of encounter within areas where different communities deal with the effects of austerity and the hostile environment? What can we build together to locate the darkness of the womb rather than that of the grave? These are questions for the present in order to imagine a different future.

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Glossary of Participants (Alphabetical order)

Awert:
A long-term friend of the Drop-in who first came to the service as an asylum-seeker, but now that he and his wife have refugee status, he still attends for occasional support.

Ayra:
An asylum-seeker client who I worked with closely as a volunteer case worker and then interviewed towards the end of the research period.

Ghashia:

A long-term friend of the Drop-in who first came for support when she and her family arrived as asylum-seekers. She is a teacher by profession and speaks many different languages (including Urdu, English and Arabic). Volunteers at the Drop-in with informal English classes.

Hannah:

A volunteer case worker at the Advice Service who is also a therapist; she is semi-retired now, so has more time for volunteering and helping her friend on their farm.

Keje:

An asylum-seeker client of the Advice Service; the organisation advocated on her behalf so that the Home Office would find her suitable housing in the area she already lived in.

Leni:

The volunteer coordinator at the Drop-in and trainee yoga instructor.

Mark:

The Project Manager at the Advice Service, who had worked in many different front-line roles at the organisation before getting the funding for the present service. A fan of Liverpool FC.

Memu:

A volunteer interpreter at the Drop-in who used to work as an interior designer before the civil war forced him to leave Syria. Fan of the heavy metal band, Slayer and Liverpool FC.

Mohammad:

A regular visitor to the Drop-in who lives in a shelter for people who have had their asylum cases refused by the Home Office.

Nubia:
A social work student who was on placement at both the Advice Service and the Drop-in.

Paul:
A long-term volunteer at the Advice Service who is now retired. He used to work in housing advice and practices Falun Gong.

Penny:
One of the main advice workers at the Drop-in. She has been working with asylum-seekers in Greater Manchester since the early 2000s. Can speak Arabic and had a brilliant sense of humour.

Rezan:
Asylum-seeker and volunteer at the Drop-in. She had completed a PhD in chemistry in her home country before she and her husband had to leave their country.

Robert:
A social work student who was on placement at the Drop-in during my research.

Saaf:
An asylum-seeker who had only lived in Manchester for 1 month when I met him at the Drop-in. First came to the organisation for social support and to learn English and soon began volunteering. A fan of Real Madrid.

Salma:
Alongside Penny, she is one of the other main advice workers at the Drop-in. She came to the UK as an asylum-seeker and she was one of the founding workers at

the Drop-in when it first began. Salma speaks many languages, including: English, Arabic and Tigrinya.