

# **A Material Politics of Citizenship: the potential of circulating materials from UK Immigration Removal Centres**

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## **Abstract**

This paper introduces a materialist approach to Isin's concept of 'acts of citizenship' to call for an attention to the lively and agential materials that mediate citizenship claims. It describes two ways in which materialism helps progress conceptualisations of citizenship. Firstly, it demonstrates the ways in which a materialist viewpoint forces a reconsideration of 'acts of citizenship' as undertaken by heterogeneous collectives, rather than them being the sole responsibility of human actors. Secondly, it suggests that, because acts of citizenship arise out of socio-material entanglements, they may exceed the apparent intentions of human subjects. This paper argues that materials are more than bystanders in claims to citizenship; they actively mediate and facilitate encounters through which political claims are made. This argument is developed through a detailed empirical study of the materials permitted to circulate from Immigration Removal Centres during a community exchange project organised by the charity Music in Detention. [150 words]

**Keywords:** citizenship, materialism, resistance, immigration, intentionality

**Word count:** 9,678

*I sit on the floor of with a group of young people listening to James<sup>1</sup> from Music in Detention play a piece of music recorded that morning in Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre. Out of the laptop on the mixing desk comes a clear male voice: ‘Hello, my message to you all...about the journey of life...I don’t know you and you don’t know me’. James pauses the recording and for a while no one speaks. Picking up on the detainee’s words, Base 33 member Mary then explains that hearing the recordings made her think that ‘I don’t know you and you don’t know me...but we are listening’.*

[Field-notes, Music in Detention community exchange with ‘Base 33’ in Witney, Oxfordshire]

## **Introduction**

Immigration detention has crystallised into a well-established feature of the increasingly punitive landscapes of border-control that pervade Western ‘liberal’ democracies<sup>2</sup>. Within the UK, approximately 32,000 foreign nationals are indefinitely detained every year, corresponding to the daily incarceration of 3,500 individuals. This diverse population, who are united only by a ‘lack of British citizenship’, are held in one of 9 privately run Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs) across the country prior to their deportation (Bosworth and Kellezi 2016, 1). The facilitation of deportation is the primary function of these systems, for it constitutes a major tool in the contemporary formation of Western sovereign states. As De Genova and Peutz (2010, 11) explain, deportation is employed as a means to affirm the fictitious territorial alignment of nation, state and citizen; it is a technology used ‘to preserve and tidy the division of the world into separate, sovereign, territorially based nation states’.

In addition to deportation however, detention systems also work to produce this fictional alignment by concealing detainees from public view. IRCs are ‘deeply contested institutions that rarely open their doors to independent research’ and do not often feature in mainstream media unless an ‘event’ occurs, such as a hunger strike or protest (Bosworth and Kellezi 2016, 1). This suppression removes detainees from public consciousness, and in doing so, constructs them as ‘other’ to the citizens of the UK. As Maillet et al. (2016, 19) observe, by ‘obscur[ing]

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<sup>1</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup> We use inverted commas here to emphasise our view that this administrative practice of detaining individuals who have not committed crimes is part of ‘illiberal processes within nominally liberal states’ (Belcher and Martin 2013, 1).

views of the ‘other’ in such ways, state actors attempt to ‘reproduce and reinforce myths about migrants’: by confining and reducing the visibility of the people within these centres, they try to create ‘both a geographical and emotional distance between citizens and non-citizens’. Such obfuscation is enhanced by the private contracts between the Home Office (the UK government department who are responsible for overseeing immigration detention) and the management companies that facilitate the day-to-day running of these spaces. IRCs have therefore become places ‘about which we know very little’ (Bosworth 2014, 3). Indeed, whilst a small number of academics have recently been permitted access to conduct social research within particular centres (e.g. Bosworth 2014, Turnbull 2015, Hall 2012), outside of these academic or activist movements the experiences of those who are detained remains largely hidden from public view (Tyler 2013). Indeed, even within academia, much more needs to be done to find ways to engage with experiences of detention.

This paper is concerned with an additional technique that is deployed as part of this strategy of concealment. Whilst the regulation of the kinds of bodies that are permitted to enter and exit these carceral spaces has received critical attention (Gill 2009; 2016; Hall 2012; Bosworth 2014), far less consideration has been paid to the governance of *materials* within and beyond IRCs, the logics behind the restrictions upon their circulation, and the implications they might have for citizenship claims<sup>3</sup>. In the UK, tight regulations are placed upon the kinds of material that may be allowed to circulate within and beyond IRC walls. For example, when Sarah was a volunteer visitor at a number of IRCs, she was not permitted to take anything into the visitor room and had to go through security checks to ensure that no unwanted materials could enter. This included a vigorous pat-down, metal detector scans and, on occasion, sniffer dogs. Yet whilst the movement of certain materials into and out of the centres is restricted, others may be given a freedom that is not afforded to their creators; they transverse the walls of the IRC, remain within the UK, and form and reform relations with entities as yet unknown. Important questions therefore need to be asked about the specific perceived qualities of the materials that *are* allowed to travel, the reasoning behind the curtailment of the movement of others, the means by which they travel, the contexts in which they may land, and the potential ways in which they may open up new spaces for different kinds of political claim to be made.

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<sup>3</sup> Attention also needs to be given to the politics surrounding what materials are permitted to *enter* the centres, but given space constraints, this paper is only concerned with the regulation of materials *leaving* IRCs.

These questions form the focus of this paper. In the following sections we explore the political potentiality of circulating materials, and the ways in which they can become involved within claims to citizenship. Put simply, we argue for attention to the material politics of citizenship, encouraging an awareness and sensitivity to the ways in which the circulation of different kinds of material can open up the potential for new kinds of political future. The specificity of the material qualities of these elements, as well as human perceptions of these qualities and of their political potential (particularly by the actors seeking to govern their circulation), is critical for defining the kinds of future that can subsequently emerge. Whether it is a recording that allows for a detainee's voice and testimony to be heard beyond the IRC walls; the written down lyrics of a song that is confiscated by guards once read; or a graphic video recording of the mistreatment of detainees, we consider the material particularities of these circulating elements to be key to understanding the manner in which they are governed, and for understanding the forms of political future that can come into being.

### *Conversations between citizenship and materialism*

Our argument in this paper is predicated upon the recognition that materials *are* entering and exiting IRCs and that, without the work done by these materials, the 'acts of citizenship' examined here would simply not have been possible. Following Isin and Nielsen (2008), we conceptualise citizenship as more than simply a form of state membership: it is located in acts where 'subjects constitute themselves as citizens ... as those to whom the right to have rights is due' (Isin and Nielsen 2008, 2). We therefore view citizenship as an act; as a dynamic process of claims-making that is open to continual redefinition. Whilst we agree with Isin and Nielsen's approach however, we also note that there is often an implicit assumption that practices of claims-making take place against a passive backdrop. Space is conceived as a pre-existing absolute: a fixed container in which human action plays out. Few studies have consequently considered the ways in which the material constitution of space may affect the formation and enactment of political claims<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Such attention to matter and the material has 'pluralised discussions of the political' that had previously been accused of privileging the discursive and casting anything non-human outside of the political field (Meehan et al. 2013, 2). Indeed Meehan et al. (2013, 3), following Bennett (2010), have called for attention to the 'brute materiality and objective force of things' in political geography, and to the ontological force that things themselves generate. Such an orientation has resulted in a refocussing of many established conventions within political geography. For instance, Darling (2014, 484) notes how 'destabilising the image of an unwieldy and abstract state apparatus in this manner has become an important orientation within political geography'. In this paper, we conceive of 'politics' or 'the political' not as a grand narrative, but rather as an emergent phenomena that is characterised (but not determined) by the disruption of power relations.

Geographers are well placed to think about the political implications of material artefacts, for the significance of the material within social processes has developed as a major theme within the discipline. Geography has undergone a material (re)turn in recent years (Whatmore 2006), in which geographers have begun to extensively explore the manifold ways in which ‘things, living or dead, [are] woven in complex ways into the fabric of human and social being’ (Kirsch 2012, 435). This geographical focus on materialism has broadly followed the trajectory of the wider intellectual movement of materialism, a school of thought that has attempted to restore agency to the non-human by emphasising its vitality: its ability to act independently of human intervention (Pickering 1993). The vital materialism of Jane Bennett has been particularly influential within this material turn, advocating the necessity of paying close attention to the ‘thing-power’ of materials: that is, ‘the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle’ (2010, 6). The benefits of this approach, Bennett has argued, come from the way in which it holds the potential to transform analyses of political events, for it enables scholars to appreciate the ways in which materials become involved in different kinds of political situations.

Indeed, Bennett argues that we must additionally appreciate how human life is always already folded through with nonhuman and more-than-human forces. Building upon the foundational work of scholars from the various but related fields of science and technology studies, actor-network theory, and assemblage, numerous geographers have argued that the human must only ever be seen to come into being through its complex interactions with the material world (Braun and Whatmore 2010, xviii; see Clark et al. 2008; Anderson and Wylie 2009; Gregson and Crang 2010). In this way, the traditional binaries between humans and non-humans, nature and society, and subjects and objects, have begun to be broken down; geographers instead see the human and nonhuman worlds as inherently intertwined (Braun and Whatmore 2010).

Perhaps most significantly however, materialism has encouraged geographers to also appreciate how space itself is socio-materially constituted. In a departure from the traditional Cartesian accounts of space that had previously characterised geographical scholarship, space is now commonly perceived as something that is continually performed through the actions of both material and human actants (Murdoch 1998), and not as a pre-existing, rigid, or absolute, given. Space from this view is the moment-by-moment product of constantly changing relations between humans and things, and the material is thus integral to its construction and the making of claims to it. It is this position that we adopt in this paper. We conceive of space

as not existing as a passive backdrop for human action, but as instead being actively and strategically involved in the performance of (de)politicised subjects. As such, following Barad (2007, 170), we wish to draw attention to how '[b]odies do not simply take their places in the world. They are not simply situated in, or located in, particular environments. Rather, 'environments' and 'bodies' are intra-actively co-constituted.' As such, we argue that 'acts of citizenship' - through which the political subjectivities of human bodies are constituted - must be seen as enacted *by humans and materials*. Political bodies in their making are not only formed through their own actions, but come into being through socio-material entanglements. Materials are more than mere bystanders: they actively facilitate and mediate particular encounters that enable certain kinds of claim to be made.

Adopting a materialist approach to the concept of 'acts of citizenship' can further our conceptualisation of intent in the making of citizenship claims. Isin and Neilson (2008) argue that 'acts' of citizenship have a virtual existence that may be actualized under certain conditions, and that these acts can have an effect which does not necessarily correspond to an intention of the actor. As such, the actions done by certain embodied subjects can create ruptures regardless of whether they were intended or not (a rupture is not defined here as a spectacular and revolutionary event, but as an event that creates a link between meanings and spaces, that exceeds - both spatially and temporally - the moment in which it happens). Acts of citizenship therefore 'create a sense of the possible and of a citizenship that is 'yet to come'' (Isin and Nielsen 2008, 4). As such, we cannot conceptualize the act without looking at the relations required to actualize it. To talk about an 'act of citizenship' is to talk about creation, and the potentiality of an act being, or not being, or not requiring to be. This, we argue, has resonance with a materialist approach, for it is through the intra-actions<sup>5</sup> of bodies and things, the specific ways in which space is socio-materially structured, that 'what is possible and what is impossible [...] is reconfigured and reconfiguring' (Barad 2007, 177). In other words, both the material and the human, in their complex interactions, condition what forms of political claims can be made in a given moment, and these relations are constantly undergoing transformation and change. Agency is therefore 'not aligned with human intentionality' (Barad 2007, 177); the world in its becoming exceeds human ability to know or control it. As such, its 'effervescence, its exuberant creativeness, can never be contained or suspended' and the 'future is radically open at every turn' (Barad 2007, 178).

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<sup>5</sup> The term 'intra-action' is borrowed from Barad (2007). It troubles notions of causality in which one or more completed wholes interact to produce an effect, emphasizing the way that elements are constructed through productive encounters.

In taking this approach, this paper builds upon existing literature that engages with the materiality of immigrant life, albeit not in detention. We follow Darling's (2014, 484) appeal for immigration scholars to take seriously 'the connections between materials, discourses and affective states' in order to critically investigate the 'oppressive force' of the state's impact on the lives of asylum-seekers. Similarly Ho and Hatfield (2011)'s special issue on 'Migration and Everyday matters' contains papers addressing the intersection of migration and the material (e.g. Dudley 2011, Conlon 2011). Geographers have also engaged with the materiality of carceral spaces - for example Conlon and Himestra (2016) have examined how migration and criminality overlap in terms of both legal and ideological landscapes, together with spaces of detention and/or prison. Previous work on the geography of encounters has engaged with the significance of the material in the production and mediation of politically meaningful encounters, albeit not specifically in relation to claims to citizenship (e.g. Askins and Pain 2011, Valentine 2008, Darling and Wilson 2016).

Our argument is advanced through a detailed empirical study of a Music in Detention community exchange project, in which the circulation of music into and out of IRCs was facilitated. Music in Detention is an independent charity that holds music workshops within IRCs and organises exchange projects between detainees and local community groups. Such projects are premised around facilitating encounters between the members of these two groups. Despite being unable to meet due to restrictions placed upon their bodily movements<sup>6</sup>, detainees and members of the wider public are able to communicate via the physical transfer of music and recorded messages: material products that are permitted by the IRC management staff to circulate between these spaces. Group members write songs together, typically responding to the recordings they have received, and they try to find links and common themes across their spheres of experience. This sharing of voices disrupts the invisibility of detainees. Indeed, this is one of Music in Detention's stated aims: to bring immigration detainees and local communities together 'to share, create and enjoy music, enabling often-ignored voices to be heard in new ways' (Music in Detention 2014).

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<sup>6</sup> No under-18s or vulnerable adults are permitted to visit detainees unless they are visiting family members (AVID 2016).

Empirically, this paper draws upon recent (2015/16) ethnographic research that Sarah conducted<sup>7</sup> during a recent exchange. This project involved the facilitation of a number of encounters between Base 33, a youth group who ‘support young people who are disadvantaged, vulnerable or at risk’ in Witney, Oxfordshire (Base 33 2016), and detainees from the nearby Campsfield House IRC, an IRC run by outsourcing company, Mitie. Both of these seemingly diverse groups share a common precarity: Base 33 hosts a group of disadvantaged young people from the Witney area, and the detainees within the IRC are excluded from many of the rights afforded to UK citizens. Both also are united by their exclusion from full membership to the polity, either by their citizenship ‘status’ or by their age. Despite only being separated by a distance of 10 miles, these groups are unable to meet due to restrictions on youth entry to IRCs and due to the restrictions placed by the IRCs upon detainees’ movement. The project took place over a three-week period, totalling 12 sessions across both locations. Music in Detention staff and their equipment moved between these two groups, recording music, playing it back, and facilitating the writing of songs.

Our article consists of four sections. First we outline how materials circulate beyond UK IRCs, exploring the politics of governance and the logics through which their movement is regulated. Particular emphasis is placed in this section upon the perceived potentiality of materials throughout their imagined circulations and the way that this informs stakeholder actions. Here we utilise Isin and Neilson’s (2008) ‘acts of citizenship’, to call for attention to the lively and agential materials that mediate citizenship claims. In doing so, we argue that a philosophical approach that transcends human exceptionalism can help us to develop accounts of resistance and claims making that extend beyond matters of linear intentionality. The paper’s second section looks at ‘acts of citizenship’ as performed by heterogeneous collectives; how musical performances are transformed into various material products and the forms of material agency and forms of political potentiality that may develop as a result. The third section then looks at the ways in which these materials may travel beyond the IRC, and the ways in which the configurations of their different sites of encounter can result in unexpected affects and the emergence of new political situations. Finally, we conclude with a reflection on what it might mean to think of ‘acts of citizenship’ through a materialist lens.

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<sup>7</sup> It was not possible to obtain access to conduct research within the IRC, as Sarah’s application to the Home Office in 2014 never received an answer. As Sarah did not enter the centre, she took part in the community side of the project conducting interviews, participant observation at Base 33 and taking part in a focus group.



## The governance of materials leaving IRCs

*‘[I]t is in this grey area, that is the problem...I don’t really care but I don’t want to be deported, or have my citizenship revoked or whatever’*

[Interview Matilda, Art Practitioner, IRC]

The precise contours of the legal landscape that comprises the UK’s detention system are notoriously difficult to map. This is due in part to the private contracts between the Home Office and the outsourced management firms, but it is also a product of the complex mesh of legislation that governs the asylum system in the UK. In the context of discussing what materials can or cannot enter or leave an IRC, the lack of unrestricted public access to information about these sites, combined with a relentless legislative ‘policy churn’ (Gill 2016, 13) results in, as art practitioner Matilda states, a ‘grey area’ for detainees, lawyers, artists, IRC officers, charities and researchers to negotiate. Legally, the Detention Centre Rules (2001) state that:

*54.—(1) “No person shall, without authority, convey into or throw into or deposit in a detention centre, or convey or throw out of a detention centre, or convey to a detained person, or deposit in any place with intent that it shall come into the possession of a detained person, any money, clothing, food, drink, tobacco, letter, paper, book, tool or other article whatever”.*

[The Detention Centre Rules 2001 No. 238, V, 54(1)]

Despite this apparent blanket refusal to allow any materials to pass IRC walls however, certain items (such as artwork, music, faxes and letters) may be permitted to circulate beyond these centres. This is not however, to negate the myriad of transactions and circulations of objects, people and policies that make up the infrastructure of immigration detention (Gill et al. 2016, Conlon and Himestra 2016). Instead these circulations are a likely consequence of the absence of any clear guidelines over what ‘authority’ is required to sanction the movement of materials (and an absence of a clear definition of what material circulations should be considered unacceptable). Their movement may also be justified on the basis of another competing Detention Centre Rule (2001, 17(1)) which requires that: *‘All detained persons shall be provided with an opportunity to participate in activities to meet, as far as possible, their recreational and intellectual needs and the relief of boredom’*. It is likely that the conflict between these two rules is the primary reason that discretion is used by IRC management staff

to monitor and curtail the possible trajectories of materials. Yet, what logics might be seen to drive the discretionary decisions employed in governing the circulation of these materials?

### *A logic of paranoia*

In the context of a consistently contentious and highly charged political environment surrounding issues of immigration in the UK, the prevailing disposition amongst IRC stakeholders is one of hypersensitivity. Indeed, it is now widely accepted by academics, policymakers and asylum-seekers alike that anxiety is prevalent within the UK's asylum system: a logic of paranoia pervades. Significantly for this paper, this paranoia has manifested itself in a heightened concern for the kinds of information and materials that are permitted to leave IRCs, and it is this same concern that has led to the widespread restriction of access to IRCs for researchers, non-governmental organisations, and activists (Gill 2016). Iain, an independent music teacher who works within IRCs, expands upon this institutionalized anxiety, describing how the 'worst-case-scenario' haunts the hypersensitive, reactionary responses of stakeholders, the circulation of materials being regulated according to the fear that there is 'always a Sun or Daily Mail headline waiting to happen'.<sup>8</sup>

Paradoxically, the Home Office's two greatest concerns regarding circulating materials appear to be focused simultaneously on preventing evidence of human rights abuses from circulating beyond IRC walls, and on blocking the release of evidence that might be used to suggest that detainees are having 'too good a time'. As such, the Home Office's apparent worst-case scenario involves the media either reporting abuses of state power, or alleging that taxpayer's money is being inappropriately spent. The result, as Iain explained, is that 'you're kind of meant to do a good job, but [you] don't draw too much attention to doing a very good job... because people don't necessarily want the Daily Mail to be going 'look what they're fucking spending their money on''. The worst-case scenario in this example therefore provides a window into the ways in which certain materials are perceived by IRC stakeholders to possess the potential to develop certain forms of agency that could undermine or threaten their sovereign authority, and which could allow for political claims to be made. Such stakeholders can consequently be seen to try to govern or regulate the circulation of materials in order to prevent certain forms of threatening agency from actualizing.

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<sup>8</sup> Interview, Iain, IRC Music teacher

These fears have led to significant expressions of state violence. For example, concern over the unauthorized circulation of materials within the public domain has resulted in individuals being threatened with the removal of their citizenship by the Home Office. One artist who has experienced such threats explained, ‘they did threaten me with the removal of my citizenship...there was a very clear legal threat that they’d made and it was really stressful and I’m not really equipped as an artist to deal with this stuff’. This is not to say that the Home Office’s paranoia is unfounded: in response to repeated denials of permission to film inside IRCs, an undercover journalist for Channel 4 filmed the staff of management contractor, Serco, verbally abusing detainees, and revealed high rates of self-harm and poor healthcare being experienced inside of Yarl’s Wood IRC in Bedfordshire (Channel 4 2015). Although this distressing footage was apparently not considered serious enough to prevent Serco from winning the centre contract again later that year, the resultant media coverage and an independent review significantly damaged both the Home Office’s and Serco’s reputation, and caused a flicker in public opinion on the rights of detainees to have rights (Channel 4 2015). Such events not only demonstrate how particular circulating material things can come to produce opportunities for political resistance through their circulation, but also how IRC stakeholders are involved in a series of imaginative practices through which they seek to anticipate the formation of potentially threatening sets of socio-material relations and prevent them from actualizing - either by establishing restrictions to their movement or by deterring future circulations through acts of state violence.

Whilst such recordings of detainee abuse may appear to be exceptional and possess clear disruptive potential, the institutional paranoia around the circulation of materials reflects that it is never possible to comprehensively, or definitively, identify all of the other entities that bodies and material things may come to form associations with. It is impossible for IRC staff to identify the forms of emergent agency that may become available to each circulating material, nor the forms of political future that they may facilitate (such futures may or may not be progressive). This is because, as Braun and Whatmore (2010, xxi) acknowledge, entities ‘carry with them a margin of indeterminacy’: when combined in relation to the countless other material things that may also actualise their own innumerable latent, and possibly humanly unperceivable capacities, they can open us up ‘to a future that we cannot fully appropriate, even as they render us subject to a past that is not of our own making’. Therefore, whilst attempts may be made to imagine or map the contingent possibilities that can become available at different times and in different places, and whilst attempts may accordingly be made to govern

the movements of material things and the associations they form, it is never possible to completely anticipate the relational entanglements and agential formations that will emerge.

### *The circulation of materials*

Despite such paranoia however, material things do move beyond IRCs. Throughout the duration of this particular musical exchange project, a wide variety of materials became involved in facilitating and mediating the encounters between these two groups. These materials included djembe drums, acoustic and electric guitars, a single octave electric keyboard, and various equipment for recording, playing back, and editing music, including microphones, MacBooks with the Logic Pro X editing software installed, a mixing deck, a drum machine, speakers, cables, chargers, plug sockets and extension cables. When combined with human bodies, and when organized in specific ways, this heterogeneous mix of materials was able to come together to not only facilitate the production of particular sounds but to also record these sounds and transport them beyond the sites of their creation.

Yet if concerns have been raised for the destabilising potential of such materials to suggest that detainees are ‘having too good a time’, then why were these particular materials permitted to enter and leave the IRC? Arguably, it is because of the legal requirement that IRCs must provide opportunities for detainees to meet their recreational and intellectual needs, but importantly, these materials are also not allowed to simply exit the IRC: their movement is carefully monitored by the IRC management. An officer checks the equipment as it enters and leaves the centre; Music in Detention staff go through security checks; an officer is in the room at all times whilst the recording is taking place. Despite actual interventions being rare, in these securing practices the IRC management create multiple opportunities for action to be taken to prevent certain – potentially problematic – materials and messages from passing the centre walls. Furthermore, given the power that the IRC management and Home Office have to revoke access or to press legal charges (although this has never been an issue for Music in Detention), they are cautious about publishing anything that could threaten their access to IRCs, and are careful not to circulate anything containing an allegation against officer’s name, or allegation of abuse<sup>9</sup>. Despite these control mechanisms however, the movement of materials is dependent on the discretion of the officer on the day.

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<sup>9</sup> Whilst this close relationship with the Home Office may leave Music in Detention open to the charge of collusion (Gill 2016), their ethics and safeguarding policies necessitate that their staff report anything concerning to IRC staff or the relevant authority.

## Heterogeneous Acts of Citizenship

*After the IRC session finishes, the recording equipment is packed up into three large suitcases and, together with the guitars, drums and keyboard, is driven out of the centre and directly to Witney, some 10miles away. A trestle table is set up at Base 33 to accommodate the equipment and Music in Detention volunteers James, Simon and Emily begin the process of reassembling it. The music recorded from the IRC lies dormant within this grouping of materials; it exists as a virtual within the Macbook computer's hard drive, reliant upon the combination of charger, extension cable, cable, speakers and James' password to be actualized.*

[Sarah, Field-notes]

As described above, a diverse collection of materials moved between Base 33 and Campsfield House IRC during the two-week music exchange project. These materials were afforded a freedom to traverse IRC walls that was not extended to the detainees within the centre, nor to the members of Base 33. Through their collective interaction, multiple encounters between IRC detainees and Base 33 members were facilitated, and in the process, new spaces were opened up in which certain kinds of political claim could be made.

We suggest that the very assembly of these bodies and materials at particular moments itself involves acts of citizenship, of making a claim to rights. In this project, both the members of Base 33 and the detainees at Campsfield House constituted themselves as political subjects through challenging the forces that physically separated them. Via their multiple materially-mediated encounters, these participants not only made claims for their rights to be heard, but also challenged their subjectification as depoliticised 'others'.

More direct political claims were made through these encounters, too. Over the course of the project, the young people at Base 33 listened to the music recorded by detainees and responded by making recordings of their own raps, writing their lyrics over the top of detainees' beats. Such lyrics were often scribbled on pieces of paper before being performed and recorded, and in one set of lyrics [see Figure 1], Base 33 attendee Mike vocalises his solidarity with the detainees, positioning himself and the other members of his group in direct opposition to the state. *'We are not the people who want to disown'*, he raps. Through these lyrics, Mike is making an explicit political claim. His claim is political because, as previously discussed, we understand politics to be emergent and characterized by the disruption of power relations, and

therefore unable to be predetermined prior to the present becoming. Mike here can be seen to be conducting an ‘act of citizenship’ in which he constitutes himself as a political subject by reaching out to and advocating on the behalf of, detainees in Campsfield House, and vividly articulating that they too, are deserving of the right to have rights.

**[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE:** Lyrics of a rap written by Base 33 member, Mike. Photo by Sarah M. Hughes]

The materials involved in the production of music within Music in Detention exchange projects must be seen to be integral to the citizenship claims that are made. The materials permitted to travel between the IRC and Base 33 facilitated the construction and playback of music and also physically constituted it. Drums, keyboards, microphones, computers, cables, speaker systems and so forth, all crossed the IRC threshold and were combined with the material ‘stuff’ of the IRC music room, becoming assembled in such a way that the voices and sounds produced by the detainees could be recorded. After this recording session, the materials were packed up, transported the 10 miles to Witney, and reassembled in a different space (the community room of Base 33), which was comprised of different people and alternative furnishings. Through the reassembly of these components, the detainees’ music was able to be played back, and Base 33 members were able to record their responses to it.

Yet such materials were not just facilitative of political claims; they were actively involved in their articulation. On his own, Mike did not speak out to the detainees in Campsfield House. On his own, he did not hear the detainees speak, understand their vulnerability, or become moved by their songs. These things were achieved through the combined work of Mike, of Music in Detention staff, the microphones, drum kits, keyboards and various speaker systems, and cumulatively, these actors worked to allow Mike to renegotiate his political relationship with the state. Acts of citizenship therefore cannot be seen as simply the work of human actors; they are conducted by heterogeneous collectives that, in this instance, included (but were not necessarily limited to); human bodies, instruments, recording equipment and, of course, the musical materials themselves (CDs, .mp3s, etc.).

We must further recognize that these heterogeneous collectives help condition the kinds of claim that can be made in a given moment due to the way in which they constitute the spaces in which acts of citizenship are made. Whilst the specific material qualities of many of the

materials in this project were relatively durable and persistent, whilst they always needed to be carefully arranged in relation to one another in order for participant's voices to be heard, beats felt, melodies interpreted, and responses developed (as is demonstrated in the help that needed to be provided by James, Simon and Emily to set up the equipment in a particular manner), the ways in which they were arranged and combined with other people and things in the locations of musical encounters could never be precisely the same, and would always be generative of highly particular affective atmospheres that influenced participants' responses and the citizenship claims that were made (even if the specific political productivity of these actions are impossible to pinpoint). A kink in wire, for example, might create a crackle. A different speaker might emphasize certain frequencies over others. The acoustics of a venue may obscure certain musical features whilst making audible others, and different listeners may possess different histories, experiences, and emotions that cause them to be more or less affected by the music at various times. Indeed, the beats of Mike's rap apparently sounded very different within the music room at the IRC, and his lyrics may not have been universally understood by the detainees inside. The contexts that music finds itself in may therefore alter it in ways that cannot be fully anticipated: the contexts through which music is encountered may change the ways in which it has affects, and may influence the political claims that are made.

Consequently we need to better appreciate how the alignment of bodies and materials in relation to one another can serve to impact upon the acts of citizenship that are possible in a given moment. The political claims described here did not occur on an empty stage: the spaces of the IRC music room and Base 33's meeting place were not passive backdrops in the making of music and in the establishing of political claims. Such spaces were contingently constituted through the unique arrangement and interactions of materials and bodies, and these performed environments conditioned the kinds of claim that could be made. As such, the materials in this project not only made possible the encounters between detainees and Base 33 members by their traversal of IRC walls; they were active in the formation of participant responses and were physically involved in the articulation of claims to citizenship. Humans consequently cannot be seen to be 'fully formed, preexisting subjects, but [...] subjects [that are] intra-actively constituted through the material discursive practices that they engage in' (Barad 2007, 168). Put simply, the material is active in, and integral to, the processes through which different forms of political subjectivity emerge.

We must also be aware however, that the translation of these performances into recorded music involves a series of omissions. Whilst the experiences and emotions of participants can, to a

certain extent, be conveyed through music, their names, faces, life histories, nationalities, and other details are frequently obscured. In the same way, the features of the rooms in which the music is created; the details of the IRC building, the presence of the guards and the living conditions of the detainees, may all fall out of the music during its creation. There is always something that is lost in processes of translation. As Music in Detention volunteer Emily reflected during the project for example, the music's context, the collective atmosphere created in that particular moment, can never be completely replicated or enabled to travel beyond the IRC walls. She explains:

*"I mean there is no way that these two groups can meet anyways, so how can you bring you know, the atmosphere or the... that is something that you cannot import fully"*

[Interview, Emily, Music in Detention]

This loss of detail that is produced through the mediation of encounters by materials is important, for it can have a variety of political implications. One consequence is that the affective intensity of encounters and the forcefulness with which claims are articulated may be reduced. Indeed, this might be a contributing reason for why music is permitted to circulate out of IRCs, whilst photographs of detainees' incarceration are not permitted to leave. Music's inability to convey certain aspects of the contexts of its production may be being perceived by IRC stakeholders as inhibitive of the formation of particular kinds of affected political subject.

At the same time however, the ways in which these collectives come together to create music must be appreciated for the way that they *can* produce particularly intense affects: affects that written lyrics, photographs, or spoken word cannot. Whilst certain elements may be lost through music's production, others may be amplified, presenting opportunities for powerful forms of affective encounter. As Mike notes;

*"If I said to you, 'hi my name's Mike, and I'm supporting your cause', it's different if you have a beat to it as well".*

[Focus group, Base 33]

Another implication is that these materials may emphasize the distances between detainees, Base 33 members and the various members of the public who might listen to these recordings either online, or through the CDs that are distributed by Music in Detention. Whilst the points of contact between these groups are facilitated through the movement of music, the voices,



melodies and drumbeats that are captured by Music in Detention's equipment also speak of the absence and distancing of the people being recorded. The reproduction of these sounds and the awareness that they can create of the details that are being left behind (the performer's faces, names, and stories, for example) can work to emphasize that the recordings are only ever traces, or echoes, of distanced events. Therefore whilst musical encounters may, in one sense, break down distances created by IRCs in their attempts to construct 'us'/'them' binaries, the music created through these projects may simultaneously be productive of this dichotomy through the way in which it draws attention to these distances.

## **Beyond Intent**

Yet the specific material qualities of the translated music are also productive of particular forms of political engagement. At different times within this exchange project, the way that music circulated assumed different forms. At times it appeared simply as sound waves, produced through live performances. At others it appeared as .mp3 files, displayed visibly on computer screens through LogicProX music editing software. Likewise, it has appeared as .mp3 files, posted online on Music in Detention's website, and has been distributed to members of the public in the form of physical CD's, complete with booklets and sleeves containing background information on Music in Detention's work within these centers. Such various material manifestations of music are significant, for they are productive of different kinds of mobilities, allowing the music to move far beyond (and back within) the IRC. They can also generate different forms of affective encounter, bringing the music into contact with different people, in different environments, in different ways, with varying amounts of affective force. Such qualities therefore create the conditions for different kinds of political encounter and action.

Music in Detention, for instance, produce CDs from the community exchange workshops, drawing upon recordings from both the IRC and the community group. The music recordings captured through the translation of sound waves vibrating through the components of the recording equipment, become further translated as they are edited, and converted into .mp3 format on a CD. These files are also available on Music in Detention's website, placed there deliberately so that detainees can access them (sites such as YouTube are blocked by IRCs).

The ways in which the material qualities of the CD also permit it to remain in the UK, to circulate beyond the walls of the centres and to 'land in unexpected places and form

shapes...never thought of' (Foucault 2000, 321), and as such, it troubles the notion of intentionality with regards to citizenship claims. 'Acts of citizenship' are multiple, distributed forms of action, and they will not necessarily lead to a direct and identifiable act of resistance. The circulation of the CD highlights how it is not possible to untangle the process and product of creation, as this material manifestation of the workshops is itself a new beginning, folded through with traces of its past, and disrupting the view of a linear temporality to acts or claims to citizenship. Moreover, the CD can circulate and form relations with unknown actors, having affects that cannot be known. This lack of control over the direction of the CD came up in a focus group with Base 33 members:

*Chris: It's gonna spread all round the world innit. We'll be on TV, next, turn it on, and they're just blasting out our tunes. It's actually on BBC news, like this mixtape went worldwide today after 6 men bought it back from Syria.*

*Mel (Base 33 staff): Do you know what? You're joking about it but you never know. You never know.*

[Focus Group, Base 33]

Whilst CDs are initially distributed to those involved in the project, and then to anyone who is interested, this is only one beginning of where the CDs could end up; the imagined future of the CD cannot be anticipated, its journey cannot be known. We have handed out several CDs during presentations, to charities as well as to our colleagues, friends and families, yet where they end up and the context that they will be heard is not something that either we or Music in Detention, the Home Office, Base 33, Mitie or the participants can know. Indeed, a new political potential emerges when this material manifestation of music emerges; in circulating 'outside' the sovereign apparatus (yet unable to be disconnected from it) the CD has the potential to reconfigure the way in which bodies and materials are arranged in relation to one another as to structure the agential 'fields of possibilities and impossibilities' (Barad 2007, 170)<sup>10</sup>. Crucially, neither the IRC management nor Music in Detention can govern, predict or fully control the path that the CD may follow. They also cannot manage the reactions and

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<sup>10</sup> To clarify, we are not arguing that resistance is everywhere, rather that resistance is *potentially* everywhere. This is not to say that the field of potential resistance is evenly distributed; it is striated and unequal in space and time. Similarly, we understand politics to be unable to determined apriori. This understanding of resistance as emergent resonates with the materialist undergirding of this paper, whereby materials are conceptualised as being lively and unpredictable. It therefore correlates ontologically with Isin and Neilson's (2008) discussion of 'acts of citizenship' as open, emergent and focussed upon that act (rather than the action, or actor).

responses the CD may (or may not) bring. This makes it particularly important to explore in relation to ‘acts of citizenship’ because, in a system that is premised upon the governance of circulation, the movement of the CD from this socio-material assemblage has the potential to travel to places, combine in relation to countless other material things having unknown affects ‘opening us to a future that we cannot fully appropriate even as they render us subject to a past that is not of our own making’ (Braun and Whatmore 2010, xxi).

Therefore, a seemingly rigid CD may pass through many hands, and might be played, perused, or contemplated upon in many different environments. The various relationships that align between bodies and materials to allow it to play in these environments will always be formed in novel ways that cannot be completely replicated. Crucially however, these potentials relations may not be politically progressive; the CD may land with unsympathetic groups: those on the right, the tabloid press; those who will campaign to prevent music within IRCs due to concerns around government expenditure, or those who argue that music within IRCs is futile, serving to perpetuate an unjust system. This inability to predict the relations that material things may form is further illustrated by an incident that happened during the exchange project, when a recording from the IRC was played in Base 33.

*James explains that he is going to play some of the music from the detention centre... We listen silently to the song, which contains a single male voice over some drumming. James and Simon ask the group what they think this voice might be trying to say to them, asking them to comment on how the song makes them feel, even though they don’t understand the language. One staff member from Base 33 jumps in and explains that she understands the lyrics of this song, as it is in Romanian. She says that the man singing was articulating that he was stuck, but that this waiting is part of this life, and that he is a guest in this life. It is interesting how something that wasn’t understood inside the IRC has been understood outside of it, without those transporting it knowing what was meant by it.*

[Sarah, Field-notes]

What is particularly interesting about the above encounter is that James and Simon do not understand Romanian, the language of the song, until it is translated by the chance happening of a Romanian speaker in the room. The lyrics remain the same in movement, but listening to it here brings together new and accrued experiences in the room. Therefore there cannot be

singular response to a piece of music: instead, a diverse patchwork of unfolding, unanticipated, affects fold differentially into different people and places. This has implications when thinking about the governance of circulating materials, as lyrics that are not understood inside the IRC are not regulated as they leave the centre.

This point is put forward by Barad (2007, 183) who, conceptualising matter as ‘not a thing but a doing’ argues that we cannot separate materials from their affects. That music is always becoming, is ‘produced and productive’ (Barad 2007, 137), resonates with attention to the multiple, as-yet unknown relations that it may (or may not) form. These relations are potential. They may create new spaces for claims to citizenship or move the listener to think anew about immigration, but these relations may be undesired by Music in Detention if, for example, the music travels to the far-right, tabloid newspapers or helps to reinforce detainees as unwanted ‘others.’ Such an attention to materiality as neither ‘fixed nor given nor mere end result of different processes’ (Barad 2007, 137) disrupts this view of an end product circulating as possible resistance. Instead, viewing resistance beyond intentionality means that the process and product of creation cannot be separated. Such accounts of the liveliness of materials that form new relations beyond (although not excluding) human intent, resonate with Bennett’s concept of distributed agency, which ‘does not posit a subject as the root cause of an effect’ (2010, 31). Following Barad (2007) it is not possible to separate materials and affects: music takes on different force, and new understandings and intensities as it presses upon the audience in unanticipated ways. Music as a vital material ‘mobilises bodies, objects, flows, entire landscapes by unhinging potentialities that no one knew were even there’ (Saldanha 2005, 717) It is worth noting here that not all objects are equal in their capacity to form and reform relations, however and their abilities to advance ‘acts of citizenship’ (Isin and Neilson 2008). This paper has focused upon music, which can translate into multiple material forms (CD, .mp3 file, notation) and we have asserted that the specificities of music, and the materials that construct and allow its playback, have implications for both the manner of its circulation and the potential relations that it may form. Yet this is not the only kind of material that circulates from the centres: artwork, letters, staff, emails and food also enter and leave the IRC. As such, our point here is not that music is specific in its capacity to (re)form relations (it is never possible to fully know the potential specific associations of any circulating object, anyway), but rather that the specific material qualities that are assumed by music at different moments affects the potential political relations that may, or may not, form in the future.

This unknowability and ambiguity diverges from prevailing accounts of materiality and acts of resistance that have explored the use of materials to intentionally disrupt or intervene within particular configurations of sovereign power (see Marciniak and Tyler 2014). In focussing upon the circulating CDs' potentialities, it is possible to explore how these CDs are transgressing both the boundaries of citizenship and of political agency; they have a freedom that is not afforded to their creators. Unimagined encounters have the potential to arise from such circulations; circulations that bring the humanity of the detainees into contact with the state and have the potential to destabilise the finality of their exclusion. Furthermore, this circulation chimes with understandings of 'acts of citizenship' and accounts of resistance that posit it as without, or beyond intent. The focus on vital materials forming relations beyond human desire disrupts accounts of resistance or claims to citizenship that necessitate an end goal. Instead the CD is disruptive in its 'thick potential' as it opens up a 'sense of the possible' (Sharpe, Dewsbury, and Hynes 2014, 121), and alternative imaginings of a citizenship as yet to come.

## **Conclusions: A Material Politics of Citizenship**

Through a detailed empirical study of the circulation of materials within and beyond Campsfield House IRC as part of a Music in Detention community exchange project, this paper has brought materialism into conversation with Isin and Neilson's (2008) concept of 'acts of citizenship' to argue for a material politics of citizenship. Drawing upon the turn towards the nonhuman and more-than-human within Human Geography, we have put forward an ontology that detaches materials from a purely human frame of reference, viewing matter to be lively and agentic. This is important, we have argued, for the ways in which these bodies and materials are arranged in relation to one another structures the agential 'fields of possibilities and impossibilities' (Barad 2007, 170) necessary for the making of certain kinds of citizenship claim at a given moment.

Second, we have argued that because claims to citizenship arise out of socio-material entanglements, they exceed the apparent intentions of human subjects. We have demonstrated that the entangled intra-actions of heterogeneous bodies, materials and things that are made visible through a materialist lens, and which enable new forms of political action, are anything but linear. As bodies and things move through space and time they form new associations with additional bodies, materials and things, and these entities come together to perform spaces in

which different types of political action may be made (im)possible. Crucially however, the precise nature of these configurations cannot be known before they emerge. Therefore the claims to citizenship that arise out of such socio-material entanglements frequently exceed the apparent intentions of human subjects.

Yet this paper's central argument, its call for an attention to a material politics of citizenship, extends beyond this site of empirical enquiry. Whilst space has received renewed focus within citizenship studies, much greater emphasis needs to be placed upon the way that the spaces in which citizenship claims develop must be seen to be continually performed by material and non-material things. Acts of citizenship must therefore be regarded as emergent phenomena that arise out of heterogeneous collectives of material things. Indeed, there is a clear ontological resonance between framings of 'acts of citizenship' as that where the answer to question of action has yet to be determined, and accounts of resistance that posit it as without or beyond intentionality: both refute the assumption of a telos or end goal. Therefore, although this paper has specifically focused upon applying a material politics of citizenship to a Music in Detention community exchange, we see potential for the insights we have raised to be deployed elsewhere.

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