



Full Length Article

Between hope and hostility: The affirmative biopolitics of everyday smartphone geographies

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A B S T R A C T

This paper explores what it means to hope under, within, and through everyday modes of affective hostile governance. Taking the empirical landscape of everyday digital life within the UK's asylum system, this paper outlines how smartphone practices are entangled with an everyday politics of hope. Holding the tension between hostility and hope, I centre an array of taken-for-granted everyday digital practices that have become central to hope production, circulation, and maintenance within periods of waiting for asylum seekers: from online gaming and lock screen photo choices to the creation of WhatsApp group chats. In the context of banal digital practices, I argue that what hope enables — defined as alternative attachments to life otherwise (materially, spatial-temporally, imaginatively) — is a form of agency that cannot simply be dismissed as cruel or futile within the broader context of systems that harm, injure, and erode. Instead, I highlight how the ability of hope to emerge alongside hostility in the UK's asylum system challenges us to reconceptualise everyday forms of digitally-mediated agency and power.

1. Introduction

Opening up the space for an engagement with the politics of hope in this paper, I explore the difference that hope makes in the everyday lives of those living within affectively (alongside materially, spatially, imaginatively) hostile environments. Building upon work within political geography that considers affective relations between the state and everyday life (Militz & Schurr, 2016; Shrestha, 2022), this paper directs attention towards what happens to state produced-affects when they are mediated by Othered subjects in the everyday digital context. Put simply, I pose the questions: *how does it feel like to live within the UK's asylum system, and, how can digitally-mediated relations of hope change (or have the potential to change) this affectual experience?*

Building upon work that destabilises the notion of bare life within the categorisation of 'asylum seeker' (Agier, 2014; Owens, 2009; Turner, 2016), I suggest if we, as political geographers, are interested in researching and narrating the everyday experience, then we must aim to capture this everydayness in its complexity, contradictory and often ephemeral nature. The affective workings of the everyday are neither simple nor easy to map: both hope and hostility as everyday affects are ambiguous and woven into complex assemblages of the everyday. Tracing this messiness and attempting to speak from it is, therefore, as important as defining neat categories of hope, or establishing binary distinctions between what is and what is not hope. As will be explored through ethnographic accounts embedded within the fabric of this

paper, hope is neither wholly an oppositional relation to hostility, nor is hope solely either cruel or emancipatory: the lines between these realities are complex, ever changing and, often ephemeral in their digital manifestations. Through the ethnographic research set out in this paper, I suggest we must *stay with* the tensions that arise out of centring hope as an approach to mapping the nuances of power and agency that emerge, circulate, and are contested on an everyday basis.

To this, an assemblage approach is mobilised to trace the emergence of hostility (as an affective form of governing) within the everyday lives of those in the UK's asylum system. Hostile forms of state governance are always in emergence, and thus, are in constant negotiation at the level of the everyday and the subject; where possibilities for alternative political relations, such as hope, can emerge, persist, and circulate. Within this, I aim to hold tension; exploring the balance we must hold as researchers when introducing affectual relations like 'hope' into a theoretical landscape otherwise dominated by the negative effects, affects and materialisations of oppressive regimes. Inspired by the work of Katherine McKittrick (2013), I follow that opening up the space to (re)think and (re)imagine the capacities of Othered forms of life to live, aspire to and create lives *outside* of negative¹ affects is a critical task in: first, being able to centre the everyday lived experiences of those living through hostile governance regimes — which means making space for the ambiguity of emotions and affectual attachments across a scale — and second, unpacking how we (re)produce the figure of the asylum seeker in academic work (Tazzioli, 2020).

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¹ It is not that hope is inherently positive here. Hope is ambiguous. But the aim is to open up the space to think beyond negative affects such as fear, despair, or melancholy.

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In section two of this paper, I explore what hope might mean; a question that has troubled philosophers and geographers alike in the 21st century (Hodge & Hodge, 2021; Kallio et al., 2021; Stockdale, 2021). Taking hope as an affective relation or attachment to a *different* form of life as lived in the present (often hinging upon being or becoming a form of valued life), I explore how everyday smartphone practices are now enmeshed within everyday forms of hope-making that enable negotiate the realities of living within hostile environments. I take hope, then, as a strategy of (re)mediating the everyday hostile affects that are actively produced and maintained through simply being within the UK's asylum system. If hostile affects attempt to produce the asylum seeker as less-than-human — through varying assemblages of state governance — then how these affects get (re)mediated in the context of everyday digital life through forms of hope become an important tactic of living *in the everyday*: beyond bare life and towards alternative modes of living; a form of living where the bareness of everyday life within the asylum system is destabilised by the potentiality that hope enables.

I set out two main lines of thought in this paper. First, that there are a vast multitude of banal digital practices that are oriented towards producing hope in the everyday lives of asylum seekers. Second, that these practices are *affirmative*, enabling individuals to be or become *otherwise* to the political construction and maintenance of being categorised as an 'asylum seeker' through the generative force of hope. In drawing attention to these two dynamics, I outline an account of the politics of hope within the digital everyday context of asylum seekers' lives that takes seriously the potential that forms of hope enable in living and existing through alternative political relations. Simply put, I want to open the question of what it means to be a 'digitally connected' asylum seeker today and what this means for everyday lifeworlds *beyond* a lens of violence, harm, or erasure. Although this is crucial work (Morgan, 2023, 2024), opening up spaces to (re)conceptualise and (re)imagine alternative political relations (holding the tension between these two areas of research) is equally important. Building upon a rich array of previous work informed by postcolonial-feminist and queer theory, which grapples with alternative and/or affirmative forms of living outside of hegemonic structures (Cooper, 2014; Muñoz, 2009; Parla, 2019), I situate hope, not only as a means of surviving debilitating governance regimes or 'making do' with the realities of living under conditions of hostility but as enabling the opportunity to be and become *otherwise* through the (re)mediation of hostile affects.

1.1. What is hope, then?

"One of the major challenges for the philosophy of hope is figuring out the value of hope for people as they navigate the unjust and uncertain world in which we live".

(Stockdale, 2021, p. 10)

From the outset, I want to make clear that the harm, debilitation, and destruction that oppressive mobility governance regimes have on individuals and collectives cannot be understated nor ignored. Indeed, as it has been written about elsewhere (Coddington, 2020; Morgan, 2023, 2024), hostility has become the main affective mode of governing irregular migrants in the UK and broader Western European context over the past ten years. This is nothing new to political geographers who have carefully traced the impacts of hostility across varying modes of everyday life (Schailée et al., 2022; Coddington, 2020; Oliver & Hughes, 2019). And yet, after having spent a year doing ethnographic fieldwork with individuals actively claiming asylum — with over one hundred individuals dispersed through the system into a city in the North-East of England — affectual expressions of hope remains explicitly and implicitly present across my field notes, interview transcripts, and participatory mind-maps. In the contemporary moment, where discourses of asylum systems are dominated by the impacts of hostile affects, this leaves us questioning how we might integrate a politics of

hope without erasing the violent everyday realities of hostile environments.

For political geographers, a focus on hope or hopeful affects has received renewed attention in recent years (Anderson, 2006; Harvey, 2000; Hodge & Hodge, 2021). In the background of discourses heavily determined by foreclosure, ends, crises and emergencies, *hope* has emerged as a concept able to turn attention to forms of emergence or generative power that coexist or challenge fatalistic projections of present and future conditions. Yet, both within the context of this paper and wider experiences of extraordinary harm and violence, to suggest centring hope as a potentially life-affirming attachment may seem dangerous. If hope is an attachment to an object, scenario or life that is not-yet-realised, then how can hope enable flourishing? How can hoping for alternative presents or futures — in the broadest sense of imagining, projecting, attaching to different versions of present or past lives — become a source of alternative political relations? In this section, I situate these questions within wider political debates on the value of centring hope in our research to draw out the ambiguous tensions that arise between a binary framing of hope as either agency-enabling or debilitating.

Geographers have long critiqued hope as being a 'silver bullet' solution for informing utopian thinking or imaginations of alternative futures (Herz et al., 2020; Eagleton, 2017), often stemming from Berlant's (2011) seminal work on cruel optimism² and the role that future-oriented hope plays in preventing individuals from realising the myth of the 'good life' and the subsequent erosion of the present in doing so (Eagleton, 2017). Even where hope has been evidenced, it is controlled, managed, and strategically produced. For example, Herz et al. (2020) identify how hope is often mobilised by governing bodies as a mode of keeping the individual in line with what it means to be a 'good' asylum seeker, with the hope that the future will look and feel different to the present: an accepted asylum application, better housing conditions, access to communities, and so on. Hope in this sense becomes a form of governing individuals within the asylum system (Hodge & Hodge, 2021) — a sophisticated form of cruel hope that keeps individuals attached to a form of the good life *after* an asylum decision has been made, despite many of these imaginations not being materialised as Sarah Hughes (2023) recently suggested.

For those working within the context of irregular and illegalized mobility, hope has become an important affective orientation for living under precarious forms of mobility governance. Scholars such as Kallio et al. (2021) suggest that asylum seeking itself is an exercise of radical hope. Others highlight how hope in the context of claiming asylum is ambiguous: an emotion used to overcome precarious situations but simultaneously a future-projecting tool that inevitably becomes a hindrance to social change (Herz, Lalander, & Elsrud, 2022). Moreover, mobility scholars such as Twigt (2018) explore how digital home-making practices in spaces of asylum-claiming destinations are important for creating attachments to the future through a re-orientation of home. Others have explored how hope becomes imbricated within the very governance structures of asylum itself; where the control of the ability to hope disciplines individuals in a governmentality sense (Hodge & Hodge, 2021).

And yet, here I open the question of what it might mean to move beyond a binary framing of hope. I position hope as a necessary (yet ambiguous) tactic of everyday life within asylum systems or hostile environments: a strategy for both *enduring* the realities of these harmful systems, but equally as a strategy for producing, maintaining, and (re)

² Care must be given here to the distinction between hope and optimism. Within this paper, hope is distinct from optimism in that it describes an orientation towards a future, without necessarily feeling *optimism* about that future as an emotion. The experiences of individuals in the empirical section of this paper are all indicative of hope, but only some might be described as also involving optimism.

imagining different forms of living that go beyond bare life. This approach builds upon the work of scholars who have explored how hope becomes a form of agency or power, particularly for vulnerable or marginalised groups within societies (Cooper, 2014; Muñoz, 2009; Parla, 2019; Solnit, 2016). I contend that, for individuals who are already living under hostile governance regimes, making the space for hope and hopeful affects challenges the very hegemony of hostile affective atmospheres; providing an alternative sense of what it means to inhabit the space/time(s) of a system that is designed through the logics of hostility (Coddington, 2020; Morgan, 2023). When hostile affects get (re)mediated in the everyday context, there is necessarily a reclamation of power over what the everyday looks and feels like for those living within it.

This line of argumentation is similar to those who have written about reclaiming spaces of liveability within the asylum system (Burrell & Hörschmann, 2019; Griffiths, 2014; Thorshaug & Brun, 2019). This move is not to deny that negative or cruel forms of hope are *not* present in the everyday lived realities of asylum governance — hope as an affective capacity in the everyday is itself ambiguous and complex (Herz et al., 2020; Parla, 2019; Stockdale, 2021); attached to a wide range of emotions and individual projections that cannot possibly be captured in an academic paper. My aim, however, is to draw our attention to the role that hope plays in navigating the specific space-time(s) of the asylum system: where forms of life, actively reduced to the bare minimum of humanness (Malkki, 1996; Weheliye, 2014), continue to persist, and even flourish, under hostile environments. I contend that hope itself becomes that which enables individuals to go *beyond* the effects that the political construction of the ‘asylum seeker’ has on the potentiality of living within the asylum system; a collapsed form of subjectivity reduced to the barely, less-than or (non/in)human through discourses of territory, nations and subjecthood (Davies et al., 2017).

Centring hope or hopeful affects within the context of irregular mobility governance is therefore not a-political nor straightforward. To centre forms of hope in this context is a political choice; a choice that speaks to broader questions around how we characterise and represent forms of Othered life. It is in this capacity that I argue centring hope within, often predominantly negative representations of, asylum life is an important political move. Learning from the work of Katherine McKittrick (2011, 2013) — who urges us to carefully consider the frames through which we represent kinds of Othered lives in our work — I argue that *not* allowing the space for more positive aspects of everyday life such as hope in our academic writing is equally as damaging as *only* romanticising hope in the place of initiating wider social change.

Building upon this position, I argue that we can understand hope as a strategy for (re)claiming and (re)making subjecthood within the space-times of applying for asylum in the UK and, more fundamentally, what it means to be human under systems of hostility. It is in the practice of (re)mediation that I locate the transformative power of hope (regardless of the intensity or intention of the form of hope itself). Indeed, the everyday forms of hope that are centred throughout this paper may never, and perhaps never intend to, make or trigger structural change. Many forms of hope that are expressed in this paper are temporary, fleeting, ephemeral, short-term. Yet, I argue this does not make them any less important when trying to understand how assemblages of power are destabilised or (re)distributed through the generative power of hope to (re)mediate everyday affective lifeworlds. I thus situate myself within the contributions that many intersectional feminist and queer theorists³ have made to the question of what role hope plays in navigating the nuanced power structures that govern everyday life: where hope is “*seen as a force of change as it makes it possible to survive in the present*” (Herz et al., 2020: 225).

³ My aim here is not to homogenise views across these theoretical perspectives. Instead, I mobilise both perspectives to speak towards an intersectional feminist approach dealing with Otherness more broadly (see: Bliss, 2015).

In the experience of prolonged waiting in the UK’s asylum system, hope is often thin; fragmented, yet scholars persist in finding value in highlighting how glimmers or fragments continue to characterise everyday life (Herz et al., 2020) and participants continue to articulate hopeful attachments in their everyday lives. Staying with these moments of hope that emerge and persist, I suggest we can look to the novel forms of smartphone life that are now commonplace for those seeking asylum (in the context of the UK and wider Europe) to explore how hope continues to (re)mediate hostile affective assemblages.

1.2. Naming and locating hope: fieldwork reflections

The question of naming and locating hope in the context of this article does not end at its theoretical positioning; it simultaneously begins within the question of how we locate various expressions or articulations of hope within our empirical data. *Do our participants have to explicitly verbalise they are hopeful? Does hope have to be a clear emotion that is pinpointable as ‘hope’ in our transcriptions or fieldnotes? Can participants allude to being hopeful (or hopeless) in different ways? Can hope be expressed in non-verbal forms?* This comes down to fundamental questions of the discipline of political geography and how we approach hope as an ambiguous relation that is hard to pin down. These questions underpin all kinds of work that must deal with ambiguous affects and assemblages of the everyday (Anderson, 2023a, 2023b; Wilson & Anderson, 2020).

What these questions get at, at their core, is what our role is as researchers in (re)telling stories of hope: *which stories do we tell, when do we tell them, how do we frame them?* Our role as a researcher becomes a balancing act of tracing affectual expressions of hope that do not always explicitly use the word itself: a move towards tracing affective assemblages and relations to hope that can grapple with the limits of language (Ahmed, 2004). This is an important epistemological question that underpins the work we do as political geographers working on affect and assemblage thinking. This paper does not — and could never — offer a finalised, straightforward, or clear-cut answer to the questions posed here. Instead, I suggest we must open the spaces to explore these questions, and, instead of attempting to solve them, *working with* the tensions that they present us with, placing ourselves as researchers within the narratives we draw upon, or forms of hope we connect them to.

With these epistemological questions in mind, this paper draws upon a year-long ethnographic study with individuals actively applying for asylum in the UK between September 2022 and 2023. Collaborating with a local organisation providing support to individuals seeking asylum in the North-East of England, the project was co-designed around the role that the smartphone plays in the everyday lives of those in the asylum application process. The ‘fieldnotes’ of this project consist of ethnographic encounters produced whilst volunteering twice weekly at a local drop in, and later in the project, being involved in the everyday lives of my participants: from shopping, to walking around the city, to eating and cooking. Participatory mind-mapping workshops with drop-in attendees were also part of the ethnographic data collection. Each workshop (three in total) spanned 3 h each and participants were invited to respond (materially or verbally) to one of two prompts on a blank sheet of paper: either ‘*having internet connection is important for me because ...*’ or ‘*problems I have faced staying connected to the internet*’. Finally, this research draws upon twenty-six formalised interviews that were conducted in collaboration with the organisation. The interviews aimed to collect further in-depth information about, first, the role that smartphones play within the UK’s asylum system and second, the role that smartphones play in a broader sense of everyday life as an asylum seeker in the UK. A range of individuals were invited to interview: twenty men/six women, an age range between 18 and 56, and a wide range of home countries across the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and South America. Twenty interviews were conducted in English, four in Kurdish and two in Arabic. Non-English interviews were translated by volunteers within the organisation. Across the range of data

collection methods used in this research project, all individuals are fully anonymised with pseudonyms chosen by the participants themselves (where possible).

The range of individuals involved in this research project (and for those seeking asylum in the UK more broadly) brings us to the critical question of *who speaks, can speak, or has the capacity to speak about hope?* I suggest these questions need to be approached from an intersectional perspective. Being an asylum seeker does not automatically mean fitting into a homogenous category of human (De Genova, 2013; Erel et al., 2016). Instead, multiple forms of positionality exist within: gender, race, sexuality, nationality, caring responsibilities, being able-bodied. All subject positions have serious impacts on both the experience of claiming asylum in the UK and the ability to express, attach to, or clearly speak about hope. To get at this intersectional approach, this paper seeks to narrate stories of hope through the careful consideration of subject position and its material consequences for the intensity and forms of hope that are present in the data included here. This should remind us that what, where, and when individuals hope (or *can* hope) for are always ambiguous (Herz et al., 2022), but simultaneously dependent upon where individuals are situated within overlapping matrixes of power (Parla, 2019).

1.3. Between hope and hostility

Salar: "I have been here for so long now, living here for three years ... all I do is stay in my room ... waiting for the Home Office ... what else can I do? I am depressed ... lonely ... we are made to live like this".

Now, I explore three ways that hope manifests through everyday digital practices, teasing out their affectual capacities in (re)mediating hostile environments experienced through extended periods of waiting within the asylum system (Kallio et al., 2021; Lipatova, 2022). Hope, taken as an affectual attachment to conditions *otherwise* (rooted in the experience of what it feels like to live everyday life within the UK's aptly self-termed *Hostile Environment* landscape), plays out in varying ambiguous ways in each extract included: where both the ability to orient oneself towards conditions otherwise, to sustain them, or to mobilise them beyond an affectual attachment are all subject- and context-dependent. Across these differences, the point is to acknowledge that the visibility of hope in these excerpts is not merely futile, cruel, or trivial (although, in moments certainly can be) but, instead, become indicative of alternative modes of living through and with hostility. These everyday digital practices and their hopeful (re)mediations of waiting become that which enable alternative affectual biopolitical arrangements to flourish and sustain amidst an ever increasingly bleak landscape of harm, violence, and erasure. So, although the moments of hope examined in the following section may indeed be banal, ephemeral, or minor, I contend that they still offer the potential of resisting the erosion of subjectivity within the wider governance assemblages which aim to produce life as bare; instead offering a form of agency for the self to exist (in historical and novel forms) beyond that of 'asylum seeker' within the hostile environments.

1.3.1. Hopeful futures beyond asylum

Today I help Asad (a man in his mid-twenties from Afghanistan) make cups of tea and coffee. I ask him what he would say is the most important thing he uses his phone for. He tells me, "Learning English is a big thing, I use my phone a lot ... sometimes it is better than college I would say". I question him further on how he does this ... "YouTube videos" he tells me, whilst searching and showing me videos that he usually watches through the YouTube app. The videos he navigates me towards are uploaded by a man with a very strong Yorkshire accent. We both listen to one video together (Fig. 1) Asad tells me "It is a bit harder to understand, you know, with the accent, but it is important ... I hope it will help me learn English faster ... my English is good, but not great ... if I want to work here,

maybe, in the future I will need to be better ... so I spend a lot of my time at home studying, for me college two times a week is not enough".

Ethnographic notes 25/01/2023

For individuals seeking asylum, projections of future life become central to sustaining oneself through the *presentness* of being within the asylum system. Projections are often distinct from the conditions of the present (Kallio et al., 2021), where the affective modes of hostility that are currently being lived through might change or be altered upon leaving the system. Although recent work from Hughes (2023) illustrates the cruelty of these kinds of projections of the future, they are still nonetheless critical in enabling individuals to make choices in the present that are productive of hopefulness about different forms of the future. As we see with Asad in the extract above, hope gets attached to forms of life that may be possible after the current realities of being held in limbo for several years, waiting on a decision from the UK government. In Asad's case, the forms of hope that emerge about what this future might look like drives specific digital practices in the present. Here, learning English through watching various educational videos on YouTube is positioned as a tactical skill needed to flourish in the spatio-temporal horizon of life after the asylum system. Spending free time watching YouTube videos to develop English speaking skills is tactically aligned to Asad's hopes of what this future might look and feel like. For Asad, going to college a couple of times a week is "*not enough*" to fulfil his hopes of what life looks like in the future, nor what his idea of what the 'good' asylum seeker does with their time in the present (Erel et al., 2016; Secor et al., 2022). Instead, putting in the work to become fluent in English becomes common sense: attaching to a form of the future in which he needs English "*to have a job*" or "*make new friends in the city*".

It is productive to linger here in Asad's idea of what the good life

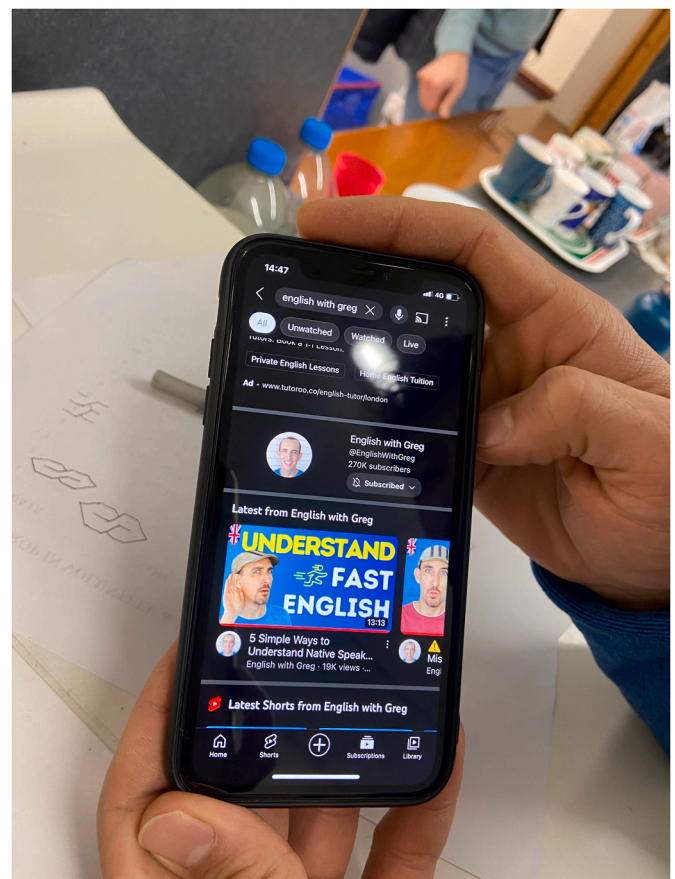


Fig. 1. Asad's Youtube search for 'Learn English with Greg'.

looks like after his asylum application. Especially so, as this is where concerns with hope often stem from; a cruel attachment to a life that may never exist in its imagined form (Eagleton, 2017). This is clear in Asad's case, in the sense that it is uncertain whether his asylum claim will be successful or not. But, at the same time, I suggest that for those governed through the asylum system where imagined versions of the future have *already* been foreclosed, the moments where hope and hopefulness *are* still able to flourish are important indicators for understanding where lines of power are both drawn and destabilised (Turner, 2016). To have the ability to hope — and thus orient oneself towards alternative space-times of the future — is a significant (re)mediation of what it means to live under and within hostility as a governance affect (Morgan, 2023). If to hope means creating temporary space/times guided by the affectual relations of achievement, purpose, or joy in the practices of the present that drive the attachment itself, then we must take seriously the potential this has for destabilising hegemonic practices of affectual governance on behalf of the state.

For example, forms of hope in Asad's case are productive of digitally mediated labour practices in the present of language learning. Although watching YouTube videos is a common digital practice that we may take for granted as a normal part of everyday life, how it is being mobilised in this context is similar to a labour practice in the sense that 'work' is being done in the present with the intention of creating a change of circumstances in the near future. Although many people who claim asylum in the UK have a basic grasp of the language, work on behalf of the individual is required to get to a level of integrating within local communities and society more widely (Salvo & de C Williams, 2017). "Learning English is not easy" (Roda) and "I don't like going to college, it is too boring" (Gamal) are common sentiments that were repeated throughout my time with research participants. Many people I spoke to about their smartphones throughout the research process stressed the importance of video content for strategically aligning this everyday digital practice with the future goal of living in the UK and integrating within English-speaking communities. Digital practices such as watching YouTube videos were often positioned as an essential supplement to in-person options for language learning across the city (such as enrolling in ESOL classes at college or taking more informal classes with charities). For example, in an interview, Ishan tells me "... if I don't know something in the college, I will come home and try to learn ... do the same course in YouTube. This helps me improve my English a lot." For those who positioned this extra work as a supplement to their ongoing education of the English language, it became clear that watching and engaging with these kinds of YouTube videos in the present was necessary work that would "pay off [in the future] when I can speak freely with people like you" (Baba, translated interview). We see here how projections of a future form of life (in this case, residence in the UK where speaking English is required) are rooted within, and productive of, a politics of hope that hinges upon becoming more than the category of asylum seeker.

The entanglements between hope and digitally-mediated learning is particularly important for individuals who have multiple barriers to accessing in-person language classes across the city. For example, Roda tells me that both herself and her mother care for Roda's sister who has serious physical impairment. As a result, "When [Roda is] at college during the week studying for her GCSE English exam, [her] mother cannot leave the house to go to an ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages] in class". Roda tells me "[She] has to help her with practicing her English ... we watch a lot of TV and videos together in English on my phone as this is easier for her". In Roda and her mother's case, digital practices such as watching YouTube or TV shows in English become critical to negotiating practical barriers that, without access to smartphone infrastructure, would prevent her from engaging with forms of language learning that are deeply attached to a sense of future. As Roda tells me, "We know that if we are able to stay here [the UK], English is very important for a good life ... my mother will learn slowly, but she needs to be able to speak with people for this". Hope manifests here as an attachment to an imaginary of a future that exists beyond the present conditions of being an asylum seeker. In

attaching to this form of future — despite its obvious precarious nature — individuals within the asylum system engage in digital practices that enable them to (re)mediate common feelings of anxiety or stuck-ness (Turnbull, 2016) that characterise the everyday experience of being within the system. Through these practices, alternative senses of purpose (e.g. learning English) and forms of belonging (e.g. a shared sense of national identity through language) can flourish.

Moreover, forms of hope rooted in certain kinds of future are also played out in practices that blur the distinction between work and play. For example, the gamification of everyday life is a trend that has taken over many labours of everyday life and learning language skills is not exempt (Dehghanzadeh et al., 2021). Apps such as Duolingo and audiobook providers are increasingly popular amongst those attempting to improve their language skills through alternative digital formats. As Santi told me, "Duolingo is important for me ... I use it very much, it is like a game ... I'm now on level 18. The app is very nice, very much popular, and easy for me, sometimes it is better than college if I don't understand some topic or something, you know?". Despite being a less obvious form of labour, engaging with gamified forms of learning are also important everyday digital practices that get attached to various forms of hope. In its strongest form, hope manifests as a projection of the future within the digital practice itself: "for me Duolingo is very important ... I need the English now I'm here in the UK, and if I want to stay here and work when my application has a decision, it is necessary" (Santi) (Fig. 2). For others, hope gets implied as a subtle attachment to the future, but more as something to occupy the present: "For me, I use library books app ... I listen too much to improve my English when I am in my house alone ... Charles Dickens I like listening to ... it helps my English and wider culture about what is important in books and things like this" (Ishan) (Fig. 3). In both instances, the practice of completing a Duolingo level, or finishing a chapter or an audiobook are always *more* than the practice itself. When delving deeper into why

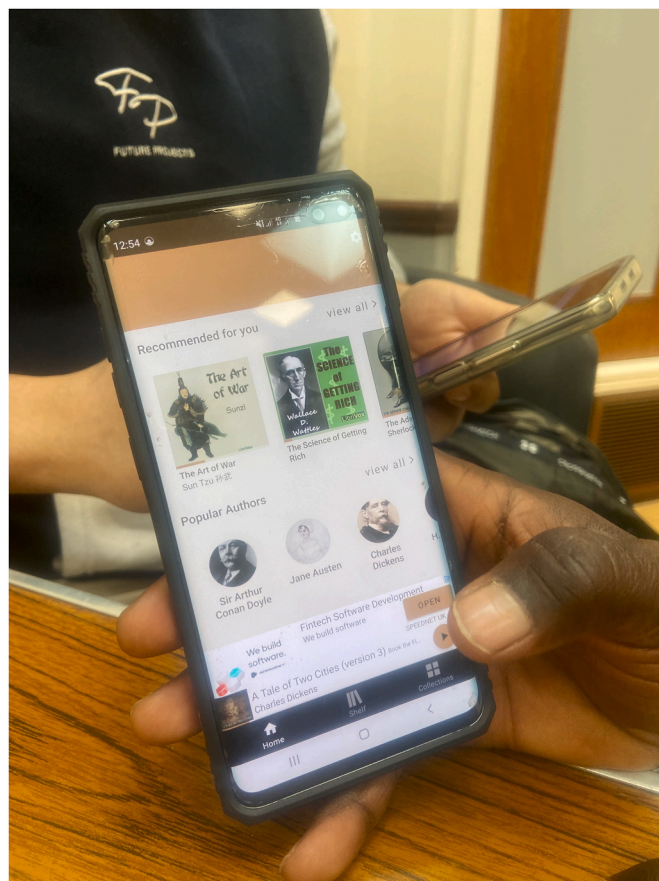


Fig. 2. Ishan's audio book collection.



Fig. 3. Santi's Duolingo homepage.

these digital practices form part of Santi or Ishan's everyday life, it is the *potentiality* of these practices that matter. In completing a level or finishing an audiobook, a step towards a future that embodies the 'good life' after the asylum application period is taken.

Although we may be aware of the cruelty in the attachments to a future after the asylum process (Lipatova, 2022), the work that hope is doing in this moment must be taken seriously. Perhaps not in attaching to a cruel or uncertain future, but certainly in the way it provides the possibility to (re)orient oneself beyond the limiting boundaries of hostile environments. Instead of focusing on questions of whether the future that gets attached to will ever manifest or not, here I want us to stay with the potentiality that these practices enable in orienting the self within broader assemblages of hostility that consume and command spatio-temporal attachments. The digital practices covered in this section — from watching YouTube, listening to audiobooks to playing Duolingo — can all be understood as everyday opportunities to (re)mediate the affectual anxieties of suspension in periods of long-term waiting (Griffiths, 2014). The practices themselves act, in the present, as a way of dealing with or detaching from the anxieties that waiting produces; keeping individuals "Busy" (Asad) or "Giving [them] something to concentrate on and take their mind off [their] case" (Santi). Moreover, the forms of hope that orient these individuals to the future (cruel or not) enable alternative spatio-temporal arrangements to flourish and thrive, despite the panoptic power of hostile governance. Hopeful attachments to what a form of life might look like after a successful asylum application are productive of digital practices in the present which have the potentiality to challenge the production of bare life (Agamben, 1998); not least in the forms of productivity that are involved in practices like language learning, but more so in the sense of alternative possibilities that are affirmed through these practices. It is precisely the ability to remain hopeful and continue to establish hopeful practices within an

assemblage that consistently seeks to minimise affirmative forms of living, which is itself a form of power that (re)mediates affectual environments, producing and maintaining the opportunity for alternatives.

1.3.2. Collective hope in a mediated present

Today I am at the drop-in. Nala (a woman in her late forties from Pakistan) asks to take a photo with me. We snap a selfie and she navigates to her Snapchat 'memories', talking me through the different communities she is involved in throughout the city. She begins scrolling further down her memory feed. In each set of photos, she tells me about the different groups: the Bangladesh community centre, a local community group set up for women, and the local church food bank. As she swipes, each photograph on the Snapchat app serves as a prompt for a story of her place in the city: "You know ... this is so important for me, these groups, these women ... apart from my husband and my son ... I didn't know people here in [the city] ... I need to be able to speak to other women, to share, to be a part of their lives ... it is important ... friendship and support ... I love my husband but [laughs] it is important to also have a life ... to have friends beyond that ... otherwise it is so lonely ... if I sit at home all day, I get depressed, you know? I like sharing the photos I take with everybody, I have a lot of WhatsApp groups ... it gives me something in life".

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For Nala, we might see hope expressed here as a collective sense of (re)mediating the present. Unlike Asad, Nala does not necessarily attach a sense of hope to the future where alternative conditions have the potential to exist (Bliss, 2015). Instead, Nala expresses a form of hope that manifests in a differential sense of the present; a present that is filled with community, connection, affirmation ... as opposed to the "Depression" that is associated with the spatio-temporal experience of waiting within the asylum system (Griffiths, 2014). Here, we might trace a version of hope that gets produced in the ability to reconfigure what it feels like to live as an asylum seeker in the present through everyday digital practices. Between Nala and the smartphone, an alternative sense of agency (as having power over determining what the everyday feels like) emerges through her use of Snapchat and WhatsApp. Here, the displacement of (or temporary distancing from) negative affects associated with the condition of embodying an asylum-seeking subject becomes a source of potentiality for the emergence of alternative political arrangements to flourish within the present.

The present is a spatio-temporal arrangement frequently associated with those seeking asylum (Dennler, 2021) and the association is often made in cynical sense: where *presentness* is attributed to a sense of being stuck or incapable of being within the progressive tempo of modernity (Griffiths, 2014; Raynor, 2021). Yet, here I suggest we might consider the present as a temporal arrangement through which individuals can (re)mediate and regain a sense of control over affectual assemblages of the everyday. Instead of being a spatio-temporal landscape that individuals get stuck within, we might instead find it productive to centre what individuals do with this suspended time: how they frame it, what it means to them, how it gets reworked (Rotter, 2016). How do hostile affects get (re)mediated in this present? What does hope do to the forms of hostility which seek to encompass presentness?

Approaching the potentiality of the present in this way is particularly important for those who — through years of exposure to hostile assemblages of governance — struggle to orient themselves towards a sense of future at all (Dennler, 2021). For example, for Nala and her husband, being in the UK for 10 years with no secure status has had severe impacts on their ability to attach to a future outside the present. In an interview, Hamid (Nala's husband) tells me "We live each day as it comes ... we have been here so long with no answers, our son is now 11 years old all he knows is the UK ... for us we don't know if we can stay or if we have to leave". For Nala then, forms of hope manifest as a strategic method for mediating present circumstances: finding ways of controlling, or at least temporality altering, the affectual and embodied experience of hostility. As we

see in the ethnographic extract, Nala attempts to mediate the everyday experience of living within affectually hostile arrangements, through collecting Snapchat memories that embody alternative affectual relations. When talking about this, she emphasises the powerful affectual experiences of belonging, purpose and even joy throughout the forms of community she tells me about. These affectual experiences do not just exist in the moment of actually doing, but are (re)visited and (re)lived repeatedly. For example, Nala highlights the practices she undertakes to take herself *back* to these affects after they have happened: in revisiting and sharing her Snapchat memories, Nala attempts to (re)capture the feelings of community that mark a distinction from the otherwise *ongoingness* of hostility. The Snapchat memory function of the app works for Nala as an archive of hope – there to return to whenever necessary to (re)mediate the affectual workings of hostility in the everyday; taking away from (even if only momentarily) the ongoing bleakness of what it feels like to live through the UK asylum system.

Not only does Nala talk about “*Swiping through*”, “*Looking back at*” and “*Rewatching*” these digital archives: she also shares them across her own networks through everyday digital practices such as WhatsApp chats. We can see from the extract that Nala herself is a key node within these networks: both in receipt of already-existing organisations work to (re)mediate the workings of hostility, and simultaneously doing the work of (re)mediating hostility herself by capturing and sharing moments of alternative affective experiences through WhatsApp groups. These everyday networks are critical for mediating the presentness of the asylum system and thus the hostile affectual relations produced through waiting. For those who can access such networks, hope exists in the ability to (re)mediate what the present feels like. This is not necessarily a dramatic change, or a strategic movement towards influencing change in the future, but a quieter form of (re)mediation that intercepts the work of hostility in determining the affectual present. However, it is important to note that these networks are not necessarily accessible nor available to all individuals seeking asylum. Many of these networks are either informally set up through social networks, pre-determined by pre-existing community groups that often exist based on identity (ethnic communities, gender association, sexual orientation), or require additional work of volunteering or dedicated time. This reminds us that systems that are manufactured to produce inequality in one form (i.e., distinguishing the Other from that of the legitimate citizen) will always inadvertently (re)produce inequality in multiple other ways (Tazzioli, 2020). This subsequently maps onto the ability to access forms of hope production and maintenance.

For individuals who face barriers in accessing pre-established networks like those Nala refers to, this does not mean that the opportunities to access hope are completely foreclosed. It does often, however, mean that forms of hope emerge through informal networks or ad-hoc circumstances. One example of this can be found in the participatory mapping sessions that I facilitated throughout my research. One of the sticky notes added to the map was playing “*PUBG Mobile live 16*”⁴ with friends. This was both highly popular in the sticker reactions on the map itself but was also frequently mentioned in conversations that I had with people throughout my research. For example, Assan tells me “*I play PUBG a lot in the hotel ... it is good to play with my friend also there ... it is a lot of fun*”. Playing online games were frequently mentioned by men living alone in hotel rooms as a tactic of negotiating hostile affects of waiting. In an interview, Kaamil shows me his games folder Fig. 4 and tells me “*Playing games in the hotel is normal for us ... what else can we do? I play with my friend, this one ... that one ... it is good for me*”. The act of playing the game was often spoken about in its relation to connecting individuals with other people: either friends, people nearby or random players. Although mundane, the act of playing the online game was productive of creating alternative spatio-temporal networks to that of the isolation or loneliness which is often associated with hotel

accommodation in the UK (Zill et al., 2021).

For those temporarily housed in hotel rooms, Vadin describes a recurrent perspective: “A big problem in the hotel is ... we have very little to do. We cannot work, we cannot just go out into the city because we have no SIM, no connections, little money”. Overcoming the spatio-temporal arrangements of hostility through isolation, young men spoke about joining up in “Each other’s rooms to play together” (Assan) or “Agreeing on a time to play with him in the corridor” (Lablab [translated from Farsi]). In a unique space of intensified hostility (ibid), opening an app and connecting with others becomes a powerful force in disrupting what it feels like to inhabit the present in the spatio-temporal arrangement of the hotel room and producing alternative affectual ways of living within hotel infrastructure. Like Nala, there is little, if at all, orientation towards a future in the act of playing PUBG. However, I suggest we can locate hope in the form of a (re)mediated sense of present that is both temporarily experienced (in the act of playing the game) and sustained within a wider community (through ongoing informally organised practices of game playing). Playing PUBG itself may not be an orientation towards a different form of future that is traditionally associated with hope (Herz et al., 2020), but the ongoing ad-hoc organisation of gaming communities becomes a source of hope for those with little alternative agency over what the everyday feels like; a form of hope that is rooted in staking a claim to a different mode of living within bounds of hotel infrastructure.

1.3.3. Hope in detachment

I sit with Madiha (a man in his early twenties from Iran). He takes out his phone and runs his finger over the unlock button. The screen automatically turns on, displaying a lock-screen photograph with a man (who is not Madiha) smiling. Madiha laughs and tells me “This is my boyfriend.” I ask what his name is, “Matt ... he lives back in Turkey ... I put this picture here for the first time today.” I try to ask Madiha other questions, but I can sense that he is getting shy with his responses. From spending almost six months at this drop-in, I know that conversations about sexuality are still highly taboo, especially for those who are not heterosexual. I know that Madiha changing and showing me his lock screen photograph is a big deal in this space. I take the conversation back to the simplicity of changing his lock screen image, asking him how it makes him feel. He struggles with a few English words, and instead opens the google translate app on his phone (Fig. 5), typing out a statement in Kurdish whilst telling me “Afraid ... not anymore.”

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Now, I want to spend time thinking with a temporality not yet considered in this paper: the past. Throughout this section, I centre moments where hope arises through a distinct form of detachment from how life previously was (Omar, 2022). Detachment, like hope, is ambivalent — difficult to pin down to any one moment or series of actions (Wilson & Anderson, 2020). Yet, what I am interested in drawing our attention to here is how hope gets produced through a recognition of change: a recognition that what it feels like to live within or inhabit the present is different than it previously was. It is in this recognition of change — of the suspension of a circumstance, set of relations, or otherwise — that I argue is where we have the potential of locating hope. Although in a temporal sense of orientation, hope itself is still being attached to a sense of present and/or future, what is distinct in the examples included in this section is *where* hope itself arises from. It is well known that asylum-seeking individuals often have highly traumatic pasts that involve harm, violence, and discrimination (Ehrkamp et al., 2021). The past also features prominently in state-led examinations of worthiness and legitimacy of the subject claiming asylum in the present (Fassin, 2013). It has been less focused on, however, how individuals navigate the ongoing affectual consequences of the past when inhabiting the present within asylum systems.

One of the ways that individuals begin to process or reflect upon their

⁴ This is an online fighting-tournament game.

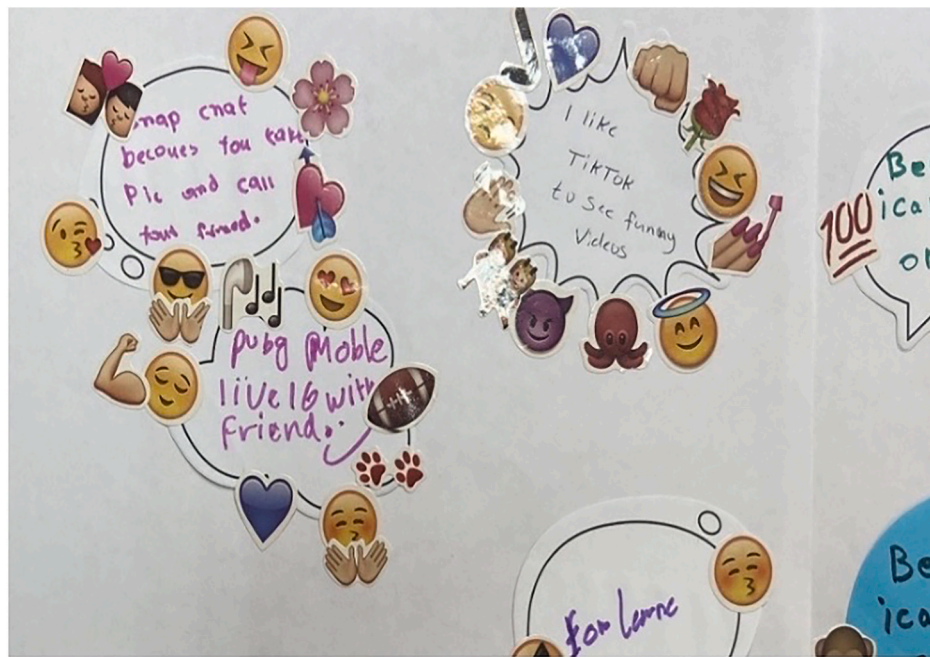


Fig. 4. Participatory mapping exercise: PUBG note bottom left.

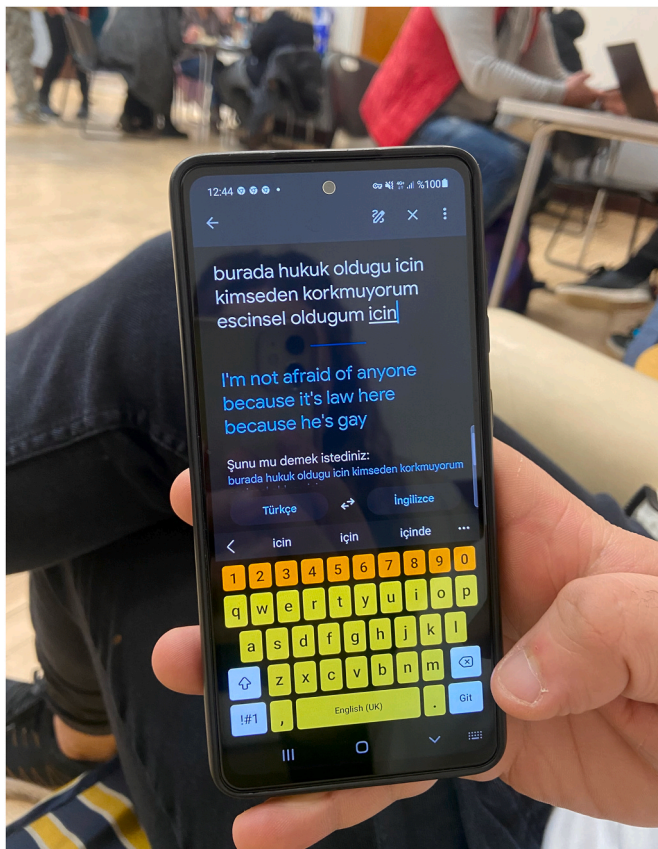


Fig. 5. Madiha using Google Translate [translation reads "I'm not afraid of anyone because it's law here because he's (I'm) gay"].

past circumstances is through their everyday engagements with their smartphone (Morgan, 2023). Many of the participants involved in my research spoke about highly banal practices such as “Looking through old photographs” (Vadin) or “Reading old WhatsApp messages” (Gamal) as a

method of (re)encountering historical events or forms of the everyday. One example of a banal digital practice in the case of Madiha is the act of changing a lockscreen photograph. A minor act in the digital ecosystem of the everyday, but nonetheless performative and informed by forms of selfhood. Lockscreen images coexist as private-public expressions of the self: not the intimacies of the unlocked smartphone itself, but still a semi-public choice made by the owner (in most cases).

For Madiha, hope is expressed in the simple act of changing his lockscreen image to that of his boyfriend: something Madiha admits he would “*never be able to do in Iran*” nor has done previously done in the UK. This act of changing a phone lock screen is a simultaneously private-public declaration of the self: with the ability to show up in the world (digitally and non-digitally) in a way that was previously not possible. When I asked Madiha how this feels to him, he lingered in the feeling of no longer being “*afraid*”. As we can see in the self-translated text, Madiha draws upon the sense of security and safety that arise for him through the force of the laws around homosexuality in the UK. This simultaneously signals a detachment from the past, whilst also eliciting a hopeful attachment to the present/future in terms of what has changed and what might change. Madiha’s narration of his affectual experiences is centred around what it feels like to live and exist in the comparative environments of Iran and the UK as a gay man. In digitally (re) encountering the past through the lockscreen wallpaper, Madiha reflects upon being situated in the present with the ability to detach from that past, or heuristically mark it as separate from the present or future. It is precisely this moment (or multiple ongoing moments within the everyday) of detachment where we can trace the work that hope does in (re)mediation here. Despite being housed in a hotel and facing many of the everyday challenges that others involved in this research project face through the e/affects of hostile assemblages (Morgan, 2023), Madiha often chose to focus on (in conversations and in an interview) the “more positive” aspects of his life here in the UK: often stemming from comparative examples from what his life previously felt like in Iran. In this case, hope is not necessarily found in the (re)mediation of hostile affects in the present moment of the asylum system itself, but actively created in the space of the socio-political *alternative*; an alternative that is produced through comparison with the past, as opposed to the projection of the future. Embedded within Madiha’s claims is a signalling of the self, and what the potentiality of becoming may hold in a society

where the simple, taken-for-granted act of changing a lock screen to a picture of his boyfriend no longer produces fear and anxiety of debilitating consequences. Hope here is doing the work of signalling a change in what it feels like in circumstances of the present; to show up in the world and exist among or within affectual assemblages.

We can also see a similar manifestation of hope emerge through more subtle circumstances or digital practices such as photography (Alencar et al., 2019). For example, Moiz (a man in his late forties from Afghanistan, who at the time of interview had received his refugee status in the UK and had applied for family re-union) tells me in an interview how *“Before applying for family reunion, [he] was living in the UK alone for five years”*. He continues *“for me, the phone was the only way I can keep in contact with my wife and family during this time ... I have seven children, the little one, I never met”*. When I asked him about his children, Moiz instinctively takes his phone out his pocket and puts it on the table between us, navigating to the photo app, beginning to swipe through a series of photographs of his children. He settles on one photograph — a picture taken by his wife in Afghanistan with all seven children lined up in age order that she had sent him on WhatsApp last year — and he begins to take me through each of their names and what they like studying now in school: zooming in on faces whilst talking. When reaching his younger daughters, Moiz pauses and tells me *“Now they are here with me in the UK, and they are safe ... you know if they were still back home ... Afghanistan ... they couldn't do anything. Here they can go to school, they study what they want, they can do anything in the future they want ... back in Afghanistan, they can't do this”*.

If we take a step back from this example, we can see how a specific form of hope emerges through the detachment from conditions of the past, and the implicit assumption of what this means for changed conditions of the present and future. Here, Moiz signals a form of hope that emerges through the marked difference of what the potentiality of his daughters' lives now hold: in the difference between being *“back home”* in Afghanistan and now living in the UK. For Moiz, hope is not a grand act of future-making nor an attachment to a radically different form of life. Instead, hope emerges in the recognition that the conditions of the present are now different to that of the past: that what previously may have held his daughters back in life now no longer (perceivably) persist in the present or potential projections of what their futures may look like. In both examples considered here, manifestations of hope show potential in (re)mediating what life feels like in the present conditions of the asylum system through the process of comparison. Various smartphone practices serve as a reminder of a past form of life: often mobilised, intentionally (or not), to produce alternative affective experiences alongside hostility. Looking at old photographs or using them in the infrastructure of how the smartphone gets used in everyday life (e.g., choosing a specific photograph as a lockscreen wallpaper to see each time the phone is unlocked) are both practices that prompt a reminder that life is now, and continues to have the potential to feel and be different.

2. Conclusion

This paper was set out to explore the tension of what it means to draw attention to the multiple forms of hope that animate everyday life under systems of hostility; systems which seek to minimise, harm, and erode the subject into forms of bare life. As has been explored, hope is necessarily ambiguous, it is simultaneously fleeting, prolonged, intentional, on the edge of consciousness, cruel and affirmative. When taken as an attachment to conditions otherwise (rooted in the affectual nature of the hostile environment), this paper asks: *what happens when we stay with hope alongside hostility?*

In the UK's asylum system, I have traced the forms of hope that become inseparable to what it means to be a 'digitally connected' asylum seeker through everyday smartphone practices. Hope, as an affective attachment to conditions otherwise, becomes a tactic of, first, living digitally under conditions of hostility and, second, a method of

orienting subjects towards the imagination, production, and circulation of alternative lives that can exist beyond the bareness of 'asylum seeker'. Staying with hope, I suggest that novel everyday smartphone geographies fundamentally alter the capacity of subjects under conditions of hostility to hope, and the ability of these forms of hope to become affirmative (enabling the subject to destabilise conditions of bare life). Paying attention to where hope emerges, circulates and stays is thus critical for engaging with the complex everydayness of what it means to live under systems of hostility.

Beyond the scope of this paper, I suggest two contentions should inform future work within political geography. First, engagements with the Othered subject, such as illegalized and irregular migrants, must go beyond the tendency to rely on discourses of bare life if they are interested in exploring everyday lifeworlds. Political geographers have much to contribute to both theorisations of the everyday and of subject formation. Staying with ambiguity and complexity, as opposed to attempting to define, categorise or minimise it, presents us with opportunities to engage with the messy realities of everyday affectual relations such as hope. Working with the tension between hostility and hope, this paper sets an example of how we might work *with* conceptual and empirical tensions as a method of thinking about the subject itself: opening the space for conceptualising subject formation beyond binaries or hegemonic discourses. As McKittrick (2013) warns us, to continue (re)categorising Othered life within the boundaries of negativity is to close down the space for alternative theorisations, imaginations, and projections of *alternatives*. I suggest opening up these spaces within and beyond political geography is a worthwhile endeavour that can enable researchers to coproduce knowledge that can account for, and moreover embrace, the complexity of everyday lifeworlds. As this paper suggests, to stay with the tension between hostility and hope is to stay with the nuanced (re)distribution(s) of power and agency within governance systems that are designed to harm, injure, and erode. Accounting for the production of bare life within the UK's asylum system is an important endeavour; but, crucially, one that fails to account for the nuances of power and agency of subjects themselves. To theoretically and empirically centre hope in an otherwise bleak and incredibly harmful system is both an academic and political choice — a choice that is rooted in ongoing efforts within political geography to destabilise and move beyond long-standing dichotomous framings of Othered life. Hope is neither an oppositional relation to hostility, nor is hope solely either cruel or emancipatory. As found in the ethnographic accounts included, the lines between these realities are complex, ever changing and, often ephemeral in their digital manifestations. By staying with these tensions, I instead suggest we might find it productive to ask questions such as: *what forms or intensities can hope take? Who gets to hope, or who gets to talk about or articulate forms of hope?* And finally, *how does hope co-exist alongside other everyday affects?*

The second contribution this paper makes to future work within political geography is engaging with the novelty and unprecedented impacts that everyday digital technologies are having on the subject and subject formation within broader accounts of alternative political relations. A serious engagement with everyday smartphone practices has not yet been taken up within political geography, despite the pervasiveness of the smartphone within day-to-day life (at least, speaking from the context of digitally connected societies). Moreover, connecting the dots between everyday smartphone practices and tactics of living affirmatively beyond the production of bare life demands attention as smart technologies continue to become increasingly intertwined with the human subject. I suggest that drawing our attention to everyday digital geographies of the smartphone can provide political geography with rich insights into first, what the 'everyday' now means in an increasingly digitalised world, and second, how we grapple with subjects that are in the process of becoming with and through digital assemblages. For those interested in hope, hostility or other everyday affects that become characteristic of Othered life within systems of suffering, the entanglements between subject and technology become a

necessary lens to think through how affects get produced, circulated, maintained, or destabilised through everyday forms of life.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Hannah Morgan: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

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Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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