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## Urban Multiculture and Xenophonophobia in London and Berlin

### Prologue

Tuning an ear to the frequencies of the street offers new possibilities to understand the social and political life of cities. As places of movement, convergence, and friction cities are inherently full of sound. The attempt to roll back a blanket of silence can sometimes reveal the complicated struggles over city life as a place to dwell in the face of stark inequalities, injustice and processes of urban change. The ‘silent walk’ protests at Grenfell Tower in West London are a good example of the politics of the city, sound, and silence. On 14 July 2017 the Grenfell Tower fire killed 71 people according to Metropolitan Police; many local residents still feel that underestimates the human cost of this tragedy. The multicultural community of Grenfell, where low income families lived just a short walk away from some of the most expensive mansions of the global super rich, has become a symbol of the deep divides carved in London’s social landscape.

Since the fire, local residents in north Kensington have organized a silent walk on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of each month to protest the ongoing injustice and insensitivity they experience from the authorities. The silent steps of the march communicate dissent wordlessly against the indifference of the local state, the thoughtlessness of politicians and the well-heeled Londoners whose attention has moved on. Silent indifference is countered with an active, but soundless provocation.

Gathered outside the Notting Hill Methodist Church on a cold Sunday in February 2018, the procession is called to formation by the whispered choruses of people saying “shuusssh”. The first of these protests started with just fifty local people, but tonight there must be a thousand or more people here.

The demonstration is led and hosted by local people, but the thing that is so striking is how open and welcoming they are to those from other parts of London who come to show solidarity. At the front there are large hearts in green with a single word beneath each of them: truth, justice, grace, love. People carry placards and candles including some green electric ones. The famous red and blue London tube sign is appropriated, but in a heart space with the word Grenfell written across the centre. Makeshift memorials are held to particular victims too.

A unifying stillness is maintained with gentle vigilance as mothers push their children in buggies, families walk together, teenagers stroll solemnly, and dog walkers offer whispered apologies for tripping up fellow marchers behind them. The multicultural of the crowd (of all ages) is unobtrusively inspiring and unmistakable. It resembles a mass choreography of what Martin Luther King (1968) called ‘fellow feeling’ or a solemn realization of Paul Gilroy’s (2004) idea of urban conviviality.

As the march progresses, these busy west London streets fall quiet. Some residents come out and watch respectfully as the procession passes, buses pull over and make way, and there is something eerie about the way London’s noise receding into the distance. On Ladbroke Grove four local fire fighters line the street and people go up in turn to express mute thanks and appreciation. The walk ends under the Westway and on the concrete pillar messages are written and beneath them are improvised shrines of photographs, flowers, and soft toys. Zeyad Cred, one of the organizers, addresses the crowd. He asks us to face The Tower. Framed by the flyover, Grenfell looks like a dark, charred hole in the night sky.

## **Introduction**

The urban scene described in the prologue illustrates powerfully the argument we are making for developing an attentiveness to the sounds of the city. In this paper we argue that in light of the rise of nationalism and increasing inequalities across European cities, we need to attend imaginatively to the fullness of silence, turn up the background of the city and hear it, and be able to notice what is felt and socially alive, but not always expressed and elaborated in words. Our argument is made through reflections on the cultural life of two cities: London and Berlin. In recent years, discussions on social exclusion and inclusion in London have been closely connected to debates around Brexit, in which the capital city is often featured as a multicultural metropolis that is different from the rest of Britain. Just as Brexit casts a long, uneven shadow on whatever happens in London right now, Berlin’s local and international politics is closely connected to the so-called refugee crisis. The arrival of tens of thousands of newcomers in Berlin since the summer of 2015, as well as their futures in the city and beyond it, continue to be at the centre of local debates be it in relation to housing, education, economy or migration. Both London and Berlin are thus currently at the heart of the most heatedly debated issues in Europe, which are shaping not just these particular cities, but Europe as a whole. They are also cities

where debates about inequality, particularly around housing and gentrification loom large in public discourse. Wary of the increasing normalization of right-wing rhetoric beyond nationalist parties and movements, in this paper we draw attention to the political and intellectual urgency to listen attentively to urban sounds and the meanings people assign to them.

To date, the analysis of racism and xenophobia has relied heavily on linguistic analytical procedures to dissect racist discourse within political ideologies and also popular everyday use (van Dijk, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1992; Billig *et al*, 1988). While there is an impressive body of work on sonic urban environments (Wilson, 2016; Gallagher and Prior, 2017), linguistic super-diversity (Blommaert, 2013), language attitudes (Anzaldúa, 1987; Cargile & Giles, 1997), as well as sound and racism (Smith, 2006; Stoeber, 2016; Shoshan, 2016), these research areas hardly overlap. We propose that the social dynamics of racism and xenophobia are not only confined to linguistic discourse: non-verbal sounds can also be associated with people who are defined as being unwanted or ‘out of place’ (Back and Sinha, 2018). Thinking through two aspects of sonic registers – verbal and non-verbal sounds – *together* can enrich understandings of the changing and contested European cities where questions of living with difference (Amin, 2013) have become politicised and fiercely charged. We do this by drawing on and further developing the concept of xenoglossophobia (Lisiak, 2016) – the fear of foreign languages – to become inclusive of non-verbal sounds as well. We propose a new term, xenophonophobia, that relates to the fear of all foreign sounds, including, but not limited to foreign languages. We look into the workings of xenophonophobia, and how it links to the everyday sensory experience of cities, as well as individual and collective claims to entitlement and belonging.

### **Sounds Foreign?**

Recognizing the city’s social heterogeneity as it is mirrored in dense yet spatially porous soundscapes through which we encounter others (Gandy, 2014), it is paramount to grasp the sensory dimensions of inclusion and exclusion, including auditory aspects of belonging and discrimination in urban contexts. Exclusions and inclusions operate through and outside language, and urban sounds – both verbal and non-verbal – serve as mapping devices that help people make sense of the city and their place in it. Some sounds are more welcome than others. Some sounds may seem to belong more, to be more ‘of the place’ than others. Identifying certain sounds as foreign might include judgments made on the basis of nationality and language

spoken, but may also relate to urban processes such as the sounds of regeneration, development, movement.

In his discussion on the production and reproduction of legitimate language, Pierre Bourdieu remarked that ‘there are no longer any innocent words’ (1981, 40). By extension, there are no longer any innocent languages. Like individual words, languages connote various meanings depending on who hears them and where. In other words, the legitimacy of a specific language or an accent is strongly spatialized and cannot be divorced from the social context in which it is heard (Harris, 2007; Back, 1996). Multiple languages heard in various constellations and hybridized forms may seem legitimate to those who engage in the practices of urban multiculturalism (Hall, 2012; Pennycook and Otsuji, 2015) and invasive to those who for various reasons feel threatened by linguistic diversity (Shoshan, 2016). Doreen Massey famously debunked the popular and ‘(idealized) notion of an era when places were (supposedly) inhabited by coherent and homogenous communities’ (1994: 146). Place and community are not coterminous, as Massey insisted: places can house multiple ‘coherent’ communities, such as those identified by the languages they speak. A progressive sense of place, Massey argued, acknowledges the connections of that place to places beyond it and is not threatened by it. It is precisely this kind of openness, ‘a global sense of place’ (Massey 1994: 156) in thinking about urban sounds that we argue for in this paper. Picking up Massey’s description of feeling like a ‘space invader’ when regarding the male spaces of playing fields on the outskirts of Manchester and applying it to spaces of UK politics, Nirmal Puwar (2004) describes how those who do not fit the ‘somatic norm’ are cast as ‘space invaders’. Puwar’s main focus is not on the sounds of the elite spaces of Westminster that form the backdrop to her research, yet she provides an evocative example in the opening pages of her book of how sound can reconfigure space. Reflecting on an anti-war demonstration that ended in Trafalgar Square, Puwar (2004: 2) describes the moment when the sound of prayer, the *namaz* that signals the time for the breaking of the Ramadan fast, echoed through this monumental space. In this moment, she argues, the crowd became a collective and Trafalgar Square and its Imperialist echoes were temporarily transformed. While the impact of this sonic transformation on this particular group of people is a unifying one, this intervention may not have been read so positively by others on the edges of this urban scene. Sounds that do not seem to be part of the acoustic norm threaten to ‘dislodge’ established configurations of international and national histories (Puwar, 2004: 3). In this case, it

is not only the language of the *namaz* (Arabic) that transforms the sonic environment, but also the form and the tone, hinting towards how sonic space invading goes beyond the linguistic.

Non-verbal sounds can also be associated with ‘space invading’. Sound, as the sound artist and scholar Brandon LaBelle insists, is ‘shared property onto which many claims are made, over time, and which demand associative and relational understanding’ (LaBelle, 2010: xxiv). As Amparo Lasen argues in his work on mobile media practices, ‘Territorial dynamics are specifically deployed by auditory experiences...where sound may create a relational space that also incorporates the dynamics of interference, noise and transgression’ (2018: 100). Lasen describes how the practice of playing music through a mobile phone without the use of headphones stakes a claim on place that can both provide moments of bonding with strangers but also moments of conflict. In moments of urban change, sonic shifts can disorient and contribute to a feeling of being out of place in previous home territory. For example, Linda O’Keefe’s (2016) work on the shifting soundscapes in the Smithfield area of Dublin shows how the attachments that residents have to the noise of the past, the cries of market traders and sounds of commerce, are an important part of what binds them to the area. These attachments linger even in the face of a much more sanitised and gentrified urban environment. In Jacqueline Waldo’s (2016) work on the sonic environments of redevelopment and displacement in the Welsh streets, Liverpool, urban change is read by participants through the intrusion of the new sounds of construction but also through disappearing sounds, such as the sound of children playing, as the residents move out of the slowly emptying street.

In what follows, we inquire into the intersections of linguistic cacophony, non-verbal sounds of the city, and attitudes towards accents, tones, and languages. We also explore how certain verbal and non-verbal sounds are identified as foreign and (thus) threatening and inquire into the power structures that shape such exclusionary judgments. We do this by drawing on a range of recent sonic examples from Berlin and London, recognizing that sound helps us generate a unique model of thinking, one that relies on relationality (LaBelle, 2010). Our point of departure in each of the cases discussed below is the sound itself: analysing its workings in a specific urban soundscape helps us unpack the discursive and affective meanings attached to it. We start by considering examples of reactions to the presence of foreign languages before moving on to reactions to non-verbal sounds. What we aim to explore in this paper is how part of racism’s enduring power is the way it moves *beyond* language and shapes patterns of aversion,

disgust, and hostility. We use the concept of xenophonophobia to begin the process of naming *racism beyond words* in an attempt to find new ways to explore how the struggle for belonging is unfolding within city.

Rather than using a comparative approach where ‘whole cities [are] labelled on the basis of a single characteristic or geographical area, and then compared against other cities’ (Ward, 2010: 471), our analysis approaches London and Berlin through a relational lens (Ward, 2010; Hart, 2002; Robinson, 2005). Jennifer Robinson points at the limitations of formal comparative methods and, instead, embraces the potential of a comparative imagination (2016a, 2016b). A comparative imagination entails both boldness and humility. It is bold because it ‘begins with the ambition to test, and to change, theoretical propositions’ (Robinson, 2016b: 193). Yet it is humble because of the readiness to revise or even discard the theoretical claims that emerge from it. In this paper we take up Robinson’s invitation to ‘think cities through elsewhere’ (2016a), that is, to think of an urban phenomenon through a different case, a different context, or a different theoretical imagination that ‘approaches places as constituted in and through relations that stretch across space and that are territorialized in place’ (Ward, 2010: 481) and ‘uses different cities to pose questions of one another’ (Ward, 2010: 480). More concretely, we propose to embrace a comparative imagination with attention to its sonic dimensions: *to listen to cities through elsewhere*. In what follows, we contextualize urban sounds not only in the specific locations in which they emerge and are immediately received, but also with a comparative attention to similar sonic phenomena elsewhere.

### **Urban Xenoglossophobia**

Language acquisition lies at the centre of integration policies across Europe. Migrants are expected or – if they want to apply for permanent residency or citizenship – required to learn the national language(s) of their host society. Whereas there is little doubt that speaking the national language(s) of the country of residence is in many ways an asset, the prevalent emphasis in integration discourses on obtaining fluency in said language(s) produces and reproduces audible others: it renders suspect those who do speak a foreign language in public, regardless of whether they are, in fact, fluent in the national language(s) of the place as well.

An adage of anti-immigrant times is that cities like London have lost their familiar sounds. Melancholic Londoners complain that ‘London is finished,’ it doesn’t sound and look as

it used to, and white Londoners are ‘strangers in our own city’ (Back, 2009). This kind of sentiment circulates in the informal circuits of racial complaint and anxiety and sometimes breaks through into the public discussion. A good example was provided in February 2014 when Nigel Farage shared with a group of journalists at the UK Independence Party (UKIP) annual conference in Torquay how ‘awkward’ he felt when he could hear no English being spoken while on a train from London to Kent. He said: ‘it was rush hour, from Charing Cross, it was the stopper going out. We stopped at London Bridge, New Cross, Hither Green’ (quoted in Cohen, 2014). These localities of inner London correspond loosely to what we would call London’s multicultural areas. This reaction is not ‘natural’ as so many advocates of white interest protest, but rather requires explanation. Rather, they are a particular ‘education of the senses’ (Gilroy, 2000; Smith, 2006) or a kind of rigged collective nervous system through which the ebb and flow of London life is given meaning (Back, 2011). They form a cluster of axioms that have a powerful affective grip on those who use them to make sense. Far from being ‘normal dispositions’ they filter and shape what is seen and heard (see also Back, 2009). Yet, at the same time, these adages deflect attention and discussion away from understanding the historical, social and political context of migration and urban multiculturalism in contemporary European cities.

Such feelings might hark back nostalgically to a simpler monochrome world with a racially monosonic urban landscape. The sense of discomfort or disorientation produced by a proximity to cultural difference is about a loss of a control and a seizure of anxiety in the heart of whiteness. Two opposed social orientations haunt Britain’s beleaguered social formation in the post-Brexit period but these are not Goodhart’s (2017) contrasts between people who think of themselves as staunchly ‘Somewheres’ or rootless ‘Anywheres.’ Rather, the distinction is between, on the one hand, those experiencing what Paul Gilroy (2004) calls a postcolonial melancholia, unable to break free from an attachment to Britain’s imperial past, whose ears prick at the sound of other languages – particularly non-European ones – and are awkward and worried in the presence of difference and, on the other hand, those within the migrant city who do not read linguistic or cultural diversity as awkward, but encounter strangeness openly with convivial curiosity (Back and Sinha, 2018).

The xenoglossophobic aversion to different languages<sup>1</sup> prompts various responses ranging from merely curious to verbally and physically violent, as the many cases of attacks on migrants in the post-Brexit-vote UK demonstrate: for example, Bartosz Milewski, who was seriously injured after being stabbed in the neck with a bottle for speaking Polish with friends in a local park (Deardon, 2016) or Arkadiusz Jóźwik who was killed in Harlow and whose brother reported: ‘The police have told us he was attacked because they heard him and his friends speaking the Polish language ... He was standing, eating pizza, and they picked on him because of that. He does not speak much English’ (Bilefsky, 2016).

Hostility to ‘foreign’ sounds is also palpably present in the majority German-speaking Berlin where those speaking a different language in public report being reprimanded by random passers-by, fellow passengers or teachers (Lisiak, 2016; Smechowski, 2017; Stokowski, 2019). Such instances of xenoglossophobia are widely associated with, but hardly limited to the political far right. Recent anti-gentrification graffiti in Berlin’s district of Kreuzberg reads, for example: ‘if you want to speak English, go to New York’ and ‘Berlin hates you’. Kreuzberg and the adjacent district of Neukölln have been undergoing substantial changes in recent years – a type of gentrification Andrej Holm connects to an influx of ‘young, creative, and cosmopolitan people’ (2013: 182). Across international media including mainstream newspapers such as the *New York Times*, as well as lifestyle and travel blogs, Kreuzberg and Neukölln are presented as perfect destinations for techno tourists (Garcia, 2016), as well as artists and freelancers fleeing rising rents in cities like London, Tel Aviv, and New York, but also, as one article quoted by Holm promises, for anyone ‘trying to escape work, or commitments, or the need to put on underwear before 3 pm’ (2013: 182). These narratives of carefree living in an expat hipster paradise can be seen as part of the ongoing mythologization of Berlin as a ‘new promised land for the international arts’ (Hausdorf, 2014: n.p.), but also, as Holm proposes, as ‘increasingly delinked from local experience and attached to a global movement, driven by an international creative class’ (2013: 183).

The presence of international creatives or digital nomads may be invisible in statistical data, as they may not bother to register if they only pass through a city (Holm, 2013), but it is

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, we focus on xenoglossophobia in relation to languages identified as foreign in the places where they are heard, but we acknowledge a similar dynamic in relation to accents that are classed, racialised, and gendered as foreign (Anzaldúa, 1987; Carson, 1992; Cargile & Giles, 1997; Power, 2014; Smith, 2006; Stoeber, 2016; Shoshan, 2016).

visible and audible in urban space. The new establishments (stores, cafes, yoga studios, etc.) in the neighbourhoods preferred by international creatives are distinguished not only by visual similarities (sometimes referred to as air-space – see, e.g., Chayka, 2016), but also similar sounds, including though not limited to the sound of English in its many iterations (dialects, accents, regionalisms). Regardless of where they actually come from, English is an established lingua franca among the new residents and visitors: in bars, coworking spaces, parks, and flea markets, it is common to hear English, with Spanish, Japanese, Arabic, Scottish or Russian accents thickly or gently coming through. Within the hierarchy of world languages, English holds a firm hypercentral position (De Swaan, 2001) and, as such, continues to be associated with economic, political, and cultural domination. Whereas aversion to foreign languages driven by right-wing agendas may be interpreted a sign of postcolonial melancholia (Gilroy, 2004) and a wilful denial of the existence of urban multiculturalism (Lisiak, 2016), in the case of the Berlin graffiti evoked here – an example of visualized xenoglossophobia – it signals resistance to the impending homogenisation of urban space driven by gentrification and touristification (Holm, 2013; Novy, 2013), a fear of losing neighbourhood distinctiveness and Berlin’s famed ‘rawness’ (Garcia, 2015). English is clearly identified as the language of gentrifiers and also adopted as a tool of opposition to gentrification, which at times literally takes on a form of hate speech (let’s not forget, *Berlin hates you*). Presumably leftist anti-gentrification activists unreflectively embrace rhetorical devices from the far right’s arsenal thus undermining their own cause. Rooted in xenophobia, the slogans discriminate against ‘audible others’ and demonstrate little understanding for the larger structural forces behind gentrification (Lees et al., 2016) and the layered processes of belonging and affective citizenship at play (Garcia, 2015). Regardless of their migration histories, economic situation, and political agendas, English-speaking residents and visitors are not identified as potential allies, but as intruders and enemies. The sound of English encountered on Berlin’s streets is embedded in the discourses of gentrification and touristification and thus rendered suspect, if not outright threatening.

Some Berlin-based leftist collectives and initiatives have recognized the xenophobic rhetoric prevalent in leftist anti-touristification protests as problematic. In a provocatively titled 2011 post ‘Spot the Touri’ (*Touri* is a pejorative word for a tourist) on a radical left blog AZE the authors ask:

How do you assign somebody in the street to be not ‘from here’? Such classification is simply impossible. So people from Berlin use language. If the sighted person by chance speaks English, Spanish or Italian they are identified as Touris. And if they turn out to have lived in Berlin for a long time, the category for Touris is quickly widened: Now they are ‘constant Touris’. This oxymoron makes clear that the Touri-assignment is often a racial resentment against a cosmopolitanism sensed as threatening. (original translation to English as found on AZE)

The AZE blog entry acknowledges and duly criticizes the centrality of ‘foreign sounds’ in Berlin tourist bashing. While such interventions send out an important signal against the xenophobic rhetoric in some leftist movements, they are not particularly visible or loud. Unlike the omnipresent graffiti, stickers, and posters demanding that English-speakers go home or threatening, quite unbelievably, to fist tourists (*Touristen fisten* rhymes in German), the statements denouncing xenoglossophobia on the left remain marginal.

Our argument here is that an attentiveness to ‘foreign sounds’, and the aversions and expression of discomforts at the sound of ‘foreign languages’ more specifically, alerts us to how exclusion and racism are marked within urban life sonically. Thinking across these examples from manifestations of the far right in London to anti-gentrification discourses in Berlin does not prompt us to equate them morally or politically, but, rather, allows us to consider how the boundaries between inside and outside are filtered through urban sounds that are either defined as belonging to ‘here’ or being ‘out of place’. Using the London example to ask questions of Berlin can provide another (perhaps uncomfortable) angle on how anti-gentrification discourse has drawn on xenoglossophobic tropes. The assumption that English is the language of an elite group of rootless ‘anywheres’ denies the complexities of belonging as a migrant in Berlin (Garcia, 2015; Stokowski, 2019) and flattens difference into a binary ‘us’ and ‘them’.

### **Xenophonophobia – Unsettling Sounds**

Not only languages and accents, but also non-verbal sounds get singled out from the urban cacophony as foreign. The sounds of construction and renovation (such as those accompanying drilling, hammering, sanding, and welding) can be associated with gentrification, rising rents, and expulsions. Similarly, the sounds that denote movement and connote urban change, which

make interruptions and interventions into sonic landscapes, may trigger a range of responses, from excitement through worry to anger.

In Berlin, one of such ‘foreign’ sounds is the noise wheeled suitcases (*Rollkoffer*) make on the pavement. The suitcases are associated with the rising numbers of tourists in the city and, as such, became a popular trope in the local anti-touristification movements: makeshift posters pasted onto lamp posts depict crossed-out suitcases and announce ‘*Rollkoffer*-free zones’; black graffiti sprayed on the wall of a residential building demands bluntly: ‘no more *Rollkoffer*’. In the past few years, Berlin has become one of the top tourist destinations in Europe (after London and Paris) and each year brings a new record in overnight stays (more than 30 million in 2017), with largest numbers of tourists hailing from Germany, the UK, and the US (Visit Berlin, 2018). The sound of *Rollkoffer* is often accompanied by muted or loud conversations in ‘foreign’ accents, dialects or languages; and it is identified as both foreign and ubiquitous – not a welcome combination.

The staccato of tiny wheels rolling on asphalt, concrete, brick or cobblestone, jumping at every bump and crack, may be experienced as disruptive particularly when it pierces through the quiet early morning hours or late at night. Obviously, Berlin residents also use such suitcases (and not infrequently while returning from other cities where they were tourists), yet in the face of the widely reported and heatedly discussed touristification, the source of this particular acoustic irritant remains strongly associated with tourists and, by implication, foreigners. The term touristification relates not only to the increased number of tourists in the city, but also the scale in which the city is affected by said increase: not just the historical centre of the city with its landmarks, but also residential neighbourhoods (attractive to visitors because of their ‘authenticity’, atmosphere, edginess) are directly affected by tourism (von Borries, 2011). The sound of *Rollkoffer* is thus sensed as annoying not only because it seems to disrupt the soundscape of a particular street or neighbourhood, but primarily because of what it connotes: foreignness. It serves as a reminder of how the city is changing.

Amplified and mediated by the sound of wheeled suitcases, Berliners’ aversion to tourists echoes the sentiment expressed by Farage in the London context: that the place one calls home is not recognizable anymore. While we sympathize with the agendas aimed at curbing mass tourism and regulating tourist infrastructures (including those facilitated by platform capitalism), we also find it important to draw attention to the latent and, at times, quite overt xenophobic

tones they employ. If home stands for safety (though – as we know from feminist, queer, and postcolonial scholarship – that is hardly a rule, see for example, Wright, 2010; Gilroy, 1987), whatever seems to disrupt its acoustics can be perceived as a threat.

In *Death and the Migrant* (2013), Yasmin Gunaratnam shows how forms of sonic expression, as well as language itself, can be designated as out of place. She asks: ‘What happens when our bodies, public spaces and cultural expectations are breached? Just how much room can we allow others to take up in our communities?’ (Gunaratnam, 2013: 86). The example she explores is how different kinds of grieving practices leak over into shared spaces.

A recent example from a fast-changing part of London, Peckham, can help us to take forward Gunaratnam’s insights to interpret some of the clashes that are taking place in gentrifying areas that have long been characterized by their multiculturalism. In an article for the *Evening Standard* the owners of a yoga studio in Peckham describe some of the challenges they have faced in establishing this space in a large multi-use former warehouse. This building houses a rooftop cinema, local campaigning organizations, a radio station, artist and architects’ studios, a nightclub and performance space and a (declining) number of evangelical churches. In the original version of article, the couple described their struggles with noise. What was notable was not that a yoga studio in a building with such complex uses struggled with noise issues, but the particular sounds that they objected to:

When [names] opened up a yoga studio in Peckham’s Bussey Building, they discovered a noise that was not so yin to their yang. “There were about twenty West African churches in here ... There’d be massive ghetto blasters and screaming” the 38 year old adds. “We’d pop by and say ‘Excuse me we have a yoga class in here’”. Such was the level of noise that Yogarise didn’t open on a Sunday for the first year. (Wolfson, 2017)

The sound of the churches is portrayed here as threatening the ambience that the yoga studio owners are trying to conjure in a way that does not seem to apply to the other sounds of the building, the loud bass of the Saturday night sound checks from the venue below or the chatter that wafts up from the ground level bars (Jackson, Benson and Calafate-Faria, 2019).

Unsurprisingly, there was a substantial local backlash about these comments on social media. For example, actress and fitness studio founder Kelechi Okafor tweeted a long thread on

the article: “This is the part that gets me angry. The mention of ghetto-blasters. Why would a church use a GB? ... But its black people so let’s say things we associate with blackness” (tweet, 6 November 2017). Here it is both the arrogance of the newcomers and their misreading of the church sound through a racialized lens that are contentious. After the backlash against the article, Yogarise issued an apology: ‘We are sorry for the offence caused by our remarks in the article regarding the noise coming from West African churches. Some of the language we used was inappropriate and we wholeheartedly apologize for any emotional damage caused’ (tweet @yogarisepeckham, 7 November 2017) and got the *Evening Standard* to remove those comments from the article.

In this section we have considered how sonic forms that go beyond language are judged and interpreted as in or out of place, the norm or the noise of ‘space invaders’ (Puwar, 2004). In both cases, the *Rollkoffer* in Berlin and the yoga studio in London, judgments made about sounds are tied to forms of proximity brought about by urban change, the increase in tourists in Berlin and the redevelopment of post-industrial spaces in London that bring different groups into close contact. The impacts of sonic space invading are felt beyond the immediate realm as – unlike judgements based on visual indicators of difference – sound travels. Just as in Gunaratnam’s example of the sounds of grief, in the case of the yoga studio/church, the sounds of worship travel and unsettle the white occupants, who position themselves as reasonable in the midst of an ‘uncivilized’ soundscape.

Rebecca Solnit encourages us to think of silence as imposed and quiet as sought: ‘The tranquillity of a quiet place, of quieting one’s own mind, of a retreat from words and bustle, is acoustically the same as the silence of intimidation or repression but psychically and politically something entirely different. ... Quiet is to noise as silence is to communication’ (2017, 18). The distinctions Solnit draws between quiet and silence, noise and communication emphasize the relational character of sound (LaBelle 2010). It is one thing for urban residents to seek quiet from urban noise pollution (including noise caused by seemingly unassuming objects such as suitcase wheels) and another thing to demand silence from sounds interpreted in racially or nationally coded ways and identified as foreign. Training our ears to recognize and address the differences between the two is necessary if we are to grasp the intricate, often polarizing workings of urban sounds.

## Conclusion

Through this article we have argued that thinking through the realm of language and non-verbal sound together – using the concept of xenophonophobia – can help us to interpret reactions to changing urban environments. We argue that responses to these sounds can provide clues as to how contemporary forms of social differentiation and division are being marked and, thus, tell us a great deal about the ways in moral and political judgements are animated ranging from attitudes to tourism and gentrification to cultural diversity or racism. Very often the response to a ‘foreign sound’ – from the wheels of the *Rollkoffer* to music coming out of a ‘ghetto blaster’ coming out of a makeshift church – defines the people associated with it as unwanted and set apart from citizens who rightfully belong. Rather than just reading these examples as concerns about noise pollution, we argue that these sounds are interpreted in coded ways that shed light on discourses of nationalism and xenophobia in London and Berlin. A consideration of the meanings given to sounds can offer a way to understand how boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ are being drawn in European capital cities like Berlin and London. In our current moment, we argue, these great capital cities, like others in Europe, are recalibrating their relationship to the rest of the world.

Taking urban sounds seriously in this way also offers a different way of understanding the affective and cultural dynamics of urban exclusion. In many respects we are suggesting that part of racism’s enduring power is the way it moves *beyond* language and shapes patterns of aversion, disgust, and hostility. We use the concept of xenophonophobia to begin the process of naming *racism beyond words* in an attempt to find new ways to explore how the struggle for belonging is unfolding within city.

Through bringing in sound to our analysis we do not wish to diminish the importance of language. Indeed, the intolerant demand to ‘speak English’ or ‘speak German’ in everyday life is how today’s xenophobes often express their claim to define and control the city. We see an opportunity here to foster a different kind of urban aesthetics that sees urban multilingualism as a resource and opportunity. With the 1992 European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages the EU formalized its policy on linguistic diversity, but “the languages of migrants” are explicitly excluded from it (2). The languages deemed worthy of protection are ‘the historical regional or minority languages of Europe’ (Council of Europe 1992: 2 – our emphasis). The phrasing of the charter is telling about EU’s understanding of who belongs to Europe: the charter

protects the minority languages *of* Europe, not *in* Europe. Even as it claims to celebrate ‘cultural diversity’ (Council of Europe 1992: 2), the EU thus clings onto the illusion of ‘coherent’ communities Massey warns about (1994). While we recognize the need to preserve minority languages that are in danger of being wiped out by central, supercentral, and hypercentral languages (de Swaan 2002), we also find it urgent to acknowledge that Europe’s linguistic diversity exceeds the languages covered by the charter (2018) and includes languages that are *still* deemed non-European, such as Arabic, Turkish, Farsi, Hindi, and many others. We suggest that listening attentively to the city prompts us to move away from a consideration of languages ‘of Europe’ towards thinking of how languages are spoken ‘in Europe’ which link, connect, and translate the European citizens to the wider world.

Looking into the workings of urban sounds with alertness to xenophonophobic tropes helps us identify double standards with regard to how different kinds of ‘foreigners’ are positioned as desirable or unwanted. For some leftists in Berlin migrants and refugees are ‘welcome’ (as countless graffiti, stickers, hoodies, and badges proclaim), while those identified as tourists, hipsters, and expats are ‘hated’. In fact, a banner depicted in Nana A.T. Rebhan’s 2014 documentary on touristification in Berlin titled evocatively *Welcome Goodbye* explicitly expresses this sentiment: ‘refugees welcome, tourists piss off’. In the UK, a Brexit politician like Nigel Farage can find the sound of foreign languages on British rail trains ‘awkward’ while being married to a German woman. These examples suggest that we need more ways to understand the mechanism whereby hierarchies of ‘foreignness’ are measured, sifted, ordered and ranked.

In the current political atmosphere, with the rise of right-wing movements across Europe, the AfD becoming third most powerful party in Germany, Brexit in the UK, and the prevalent fear-mongering rhetoric against everything and everyone that seems foreign, developing the concept of xenophobia is not only advancing a theoretical understanding of urban sound but is politically urgent. Through theorizing xenophobia, we may be able to come closer to a deeper understanding of social experiences of diversity in urban contexts, the complexities of anti-immigrant racism, but also to the sounds of co-existence and even silent togetherness.

## **Epilogue**

On 14 February 2018 – Valentine’s Day – the marchers assemble for another silent walk in London to protest the injustice experienced by the survivors of the Grenfell Tower fire. This time, though, the venue has changed. It is a brutally cold and wet winter night. At 5.30pm it looks like just a hundred or so demonstrators have gathered outside the town hall in affluent South Kensington to brave the cruel cold. The start was delayed for another half an hour and the paper green hearts and banners started emerging from parked cars and cabs as survivors and residents emerged from vehicles of all descriptions High Street Kensington is a very different urban landscape from Grenfell: council estates close to the Westway. As the march forms and the hush falls the protestors move through London’s richest commercial High Streets. Even the shoppers and tourists are muted by the heavy silence of the approaching marchers.

A tourist approaches and speaks into his mobile phone about his return flights to Hong Kong and the dinner arrangements this evening. His voice seems louder somehow against the hushed assembly. Then another sound is amplified against the emptiness – the wheels of a pull along suitcase sound a sharp growl – like an urban equivalent of radio static – as its owner hurries to get past the marchers. These are the sounds of the international super-rich who are just passing through the global metropolis.

In contrast to the wounding compassion that passes as news, this powerful movement at the Grenfell walks gifts those who attend something else: grace and a sense of fellow feeling that bridges temporarily our differences in the muted city. On these nights at least a different London is assembled in the silence, one that is less shamefully divided by the brutalities of wealth and social dispossession and the kind of city London has become. The lesson that we draw from this is that silence here – or perhaps more accurately the lack of speech – is never empty: it is full of the sounds that act as clues or keys to unlock city life. An attention to these urban sounds that might be nestling in the background is ripe, we argue, with meaning and analytic possibilities.

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