

# Listening at the Intersections

Wednesday 26 June 2019

Roehampton University

Convened by Leah Bassel and Tanja Dreher

## Background

*Listening at the Intersections* will bring together research and activism on the politics of listening with a particular emphasis on intersectional and decolonial perspectives. Extending beyond recent work on listening as a contribution to deliberative democracy, the event will develop and foreground scholarship that engages with longstanding critical race and feminist debates on speaking positions and the politics of representation. The aim is to catalyse a transformative politics of listening which is responsive to the resounding calls to decolonise scholarship and reinvigorate anti-racist activism in the context of resurgent white nationalism and far right populism.

The study of listening as a social and political practice has been growing across disciplines, going against the grain of the traditionally dominant focus on voice and speaking. This workshop explores research and activism that push beyond celebrations of voice and speech to consider how attention to listening can foreground a commitment to responsibility and responsiveness. Speakers at the intersections of different disciplines will consider whether and how responsibility for change can be shifted from marginalised voices onto institutions, practices and norms that condition who is heard. In particular, speakers will consider the ways in which the failures of listening of the present are structured by colonialism. They will identify alternative modes of listening that can be found in the experiences and scholarship of historically silenced groups. *Listening at the Intersections* aims to:

1. **Advance** scholarship of those working in the field of critical listening studies across disciplines (particularly scholars of intersectionality, decolonial and postcolonial studies, sound and performance studies) through sharing and debating the latest developments in this area.
2. **Open up** questions of shifting responsibility in ways that cut across traditional disciplinary boundaries. We aim to push inquiry beyond the established parameters of debates around speech, voice and representation. These concepts – and the broader question of who should speak and who should listen, and what responsibilities for change result – can be reconsidered and recast through the focus on listening.
3. **Bring together** ‘word-based’, logocentric approaches with the scholarship focusing on sound and performance we can open up new areas for research and collaboration, as well as potential methodological innovation.
4. **Foreground** the research of early career scholars who are working at the intersections of these emerging research agendas. These scholars are ideally placed to further develop the synergies across the intersections and take forward this innovative area of enquiry.

This event leverages the interventions of researchers and activists working in diverse contexts which have not yet been brought in to close collaboration. The discussion will foreground social and political processes where listening has been identified as a key dimension, which include the following: national truth and reconciliation processes (such as in South Africa, Canada, and Australia) Grenfell Tower, where residents repeatedly voiced safety concerns for years prior to the fire which caused deaths and displacements, and the ongoing inquiry has been criticised for its failure to listen to bereaved people. Speakers will diagnose such failures, connecting challenges in the UK (e.g. the Windrush scandal, the ongoing Brexit drama) to broader global struggles (e.g. Rhodes Must Fall). They will also explore the potential for 'listening' as a conceptual framework and practical resource in broader antiracist and feminist coalitions.

The workshop is focused through three key conceptual frames:

**1. Intersectionality:**

We draw on key insights from our past work on resistance by women of colour to austerity (funded by the British Academy), xenophobia and the far right in Europe, and the politics of Muslim women's integration (Bassel and Emejulu 2017; Dreher 2009b, 2010; Bassel 2012). We invite all participants to consider how listening is conditioned by intersections of 'race', class, gender and other social locations and how the failure or refusal to listen is structured by the legacy of the colonial past in the present and the neoliberal realities of today (Spivak 1988; Stoeberl 2016; Dreher 2009b).

**2. Connecting listening to decolonial and postcolonial scholarship:**

We aim to advance a distinctive intellectual agenda in listening studies correcting – in some cases – for ahistorical and/or 'race'-blind analyses.

**3. Beyond Words, Logocentrism:**

The workshop will cross boundaries in the study of listening beyond the exclusive focus on more conventional 'word-based' claims. This undertaking is inherently interdisciplinary, involving a focus on curation, blurring the distinction between audience and performers and exploring sound as well as words.

## **Workshop Format**

The workshop will build on the momentum of *The Politics of Listening 2018* international conference convened by Tanja Dreher and Poppy de Souza in Sydney, November 2018 <https://www.politicsoflistening2018.com/>. Listening at the Intersections begins with a keynote presentation from Dr Susan Bickford (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill) in order to engage with her pathbreaking book *The Dissonance of Democracy* (1996) and to explore listening as a form of intersectional feminist politics over twenty years after its publication. We anticipate that the workshop will plant the seeds to chart new directions in listening research.

Some workshop participants will then provide brief (up to 12 minute) talks through which we aim to maximize exchange rather than speaking 'at' each other in static blocks.

We will conclude the workshop with some plans for next steps.

## Convenors:

Professor Leah Bassel, University of Roehampton:

[https://pure.roehampton.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/leah-bassel\(c3ef0d6a-a8d2-45f0-a18f-a9ea3aa782ba\).html](https://pure.roehampton.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/leah-bassel(c3ef0d6a-a8d2-45f0-a18f-a9ea3aa782ba).html)

Associate Professor Tanja Dreher, University of New South Wales: <https://tanjadreher.net/>

## Suggested readings:

Susan Bickford (2019) – a discussion-starter paper prepared by Susan Bickford for the *Listening at the Intersections* workshop will be circulated in early June

Divya Ghelani (2018) Grenfell Tower: 'there are only the deliberately silent, or the preferably unheard' available online at: <https://mediadiversified.org/2017/06/22/grenfell-tower-there-are-only-the-deliberately-silent-or-the-preferably-unheard/>

Leah Bassel (2017) 'Listening as Solidarity' Chapter 5 in *The Politics of Listening: Possibilities and Challenges for Democratic Life* Plgrave, London

Tanja Dreher (2009) 'Eavesdropping with permission: the politics of listening for safer speaking spaces', *Borderlands E-Journal*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 1-21, available online at: [http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol8no1\\_2009/dreher\\_eavesdropping.htm](http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol8no1_2009/dreher_eavesdropping.htm)

## Further references:

Arday, J. and Mirza, H. (Eds.). 2018. *Dismantling Race in Higher Education. Racism, Whiteness and Decolonising the Academy*. London: Palgrave.

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Bassel, L. 2012. *Refugee Women: Beyond Gender versus Culture*. London: Routledge.

Bickford, S. 1996. *The Dissonance of Democracy. Listening, Conflict and Citizenship*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Bhambra, G., Gebrial, D., Nişancıoğlu, K. 2018. *Decolonising the University*. London: Pluto Press.

Bhopal, K. 2018. *White Privilege: the myth of a post-racial society*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Dreher, T. 2009a. 'Listening across difference: Media and multiculturalism beyond the politics of voice', *Continuum-Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, vol. 23, pp. 445 – 458. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10304310903015712>

Dreher, T. 2009b. 'Eavesdropping with permission: the politics of listening for safer speaking spaces', *Borderlands e-Journal : New Spaces in the Humanities*, vol. 8, pp. 1 – 21.

Dreher, T. 2017. 'Listening: a normative approach to transform media and democracy', in Wasserman H; Garman A (ed.), *Media and Citizenship in South Africa: Between Marginalization and Participation*, HSRC Press.

Dreher, T and A. Mondal (eds.) (2018) 2018, *Ethical Responsiveness and the Politics of Difference*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York

Joseph-Salisbury, R., Johnson, A. & Kamunge, E. (eds.). 2018. *The Fire Now: anti-racist scholarship in times of explicit racial violence*. London: Zed Books.

Rhodes Must Fall Movement, Oxford. 2018. *Rhodes Must Fall. The Struggle to Decolonise the Racist Heart of Empire*. London: Zed Books. Edited by Roseanne Chantiluke, Brian Kwoba and Athinagamso Nkopo

Spivak, G. 1988. 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'. In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, 271–313. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Stoeber, J. 2016. *The Sonic Colour Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening*. New York: New York University Press.