

# To 'Give Voice'? To 'Speak For'? Representing Testimony and Protest at UK Immigration Detention Centres

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**Abstract:** Efforts at emancipatory politics and media production can be characterised by a critical attitude to the very notion of representation, for example in political and artistic terms. Agency is often linked to 'voice,' and emancipation to one's ability to 'speak for' oneself. But if we insist that people 'speak for' themselves, what does this mean for allyship? Activist filmmakers, journalists, scholars and media-producers often justify what they do as 'giving voice.' Yet, this seemingly simple goal, 'to give voice,' is rarely elaborated, and the mediating role of the 'giver' of voice is often obscured. In this essay, I explore abstract conceptions of 'giving voice' and 'speaking for' others by reflecting on my own experience making short testimonial videos about protests in UK immigration detention centres with *Standoff Films*. The significance of people's 'speech,' I maintain, should be assessed with reference to intention, as well as form. 'Voice' is powerful not in isolation, but when activated in a living social context. I suggest the primary truth-value of representations resides in the quality of their constitutive social relationships, characterised by honest attempts to listen, interpret and faithfully communicate, rather than in the technical accuracy of mimesis. Silencing, of some extent, is a necessary part of this process. As media-makers, I believe we should reflect on the silences in our representations when possible, and acknowledge when silences are primarily the result of issues in the world, rather than our own failures to 'give voice.' Rather than forsake representation and proclaim "everyone should speak for themselves!," self-reflection may cause us to strategically (re)orientate our representations, in dialogue with those we represent in a spirit of solidarity.

**Key Words:** media, immigration detention, voice, auto-ethnography, emancipatory politics, activism, allyship, representation

*Saturday, 29 November 2014*

"England," a voice bellows.

"Hear our voice!" a crowd roars in response.

"We want," another voice bellows.

"Freedom!" the crowd roars.

The shouts are loud. They resound with power and desperation. I can hear them standing at the south side of Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre (IRC), separated by two sets of barbed-wire, steel-sheeted fences. I turn. With my back to the centre, I face empty farmland, black in the night and otherwise silent (fig.1). No-one outside the centre can hear the shouts except us.

Tom points the voice recorder towards the fences. I climb a tree and hold my tripod fully outstretched above my head, camera on top, and point the lens

towards the enclosed detention centre yard where the detainees are protesting (fig.5). After Tom and I record what we need, we pace the detention centre's perimeter, stopping periodically so I can film a few exterior shots (e.g. fig.2-4). The guards don't seem to notice us; they probably have enough to deal with.

We speed-walk away and find a quiet spot a safe distance from the centre gates and return calls from a number of detainees. "We are making a short video about what is happening in Campsfield tonight," I explain. "Do you have anything you want to say?"

"I simply want to say that Campsfield, that the Campsfield staff have beaten my friend very badly," one detainee asserts. "So they are treating us like an animal. Not enough food. Not medication. We are not animal, we are human."



Fig.1 Campsfield House IRC Imagery ©2016 Infoterra Ltd & Bluesky, DigitalGlobe, Map data © Google

“Like five of the detainees saw it, like eye witness. They put him on the floor and they beat him up really badly,” another protester explains. “It’s all racist here, all the system.”

“They have locked us down during that time,” a third person describes. “We have called police. Police came. They are telling police everything is ok. But if everything is ok, where is our guy who has been beaten up?”

#### *Sunday, 30 November 2014*

Vera and I edit a video the next day. We listen to the recorded testimonies. We cut down each detainee’s statement to what we understand to be its core message without them. I told everyone I would edit their statements on the phone: as they are detained, they can’t safely watch the video, let alone help with the editing.

“It is good to include the call for people to speak for them,” I say.

“I think it’s important he is blaming the system,” Vera suggests.

“That’s a strong statement,” we agree, as we cut up and rearrange the detainee’s words to condense multiple testimonies into a single soundbite-friendly video for distribution on the internet.

#### *Monday, 1 December 2014*

The video is sent out with a press release.<sup>1</sup> It does better than I expect.<sup>2</sup> Four thousand people watch it in two days. It is tweeted widely. BBC Oxford broadcasts snippets on the regional news. The protest is referenced in four questions in Parliament. A police complaint procedure is initiated by local campaigners. Yet, nobody, as far as I know, is made accountable. Detainees involved in the protest are split up and dispersed across other detention centres in the UK. The person who alerted us to the protest is put in solitary confinement for four days without access to his phone or belongings. He is moved to Colnbrook IRC in London, before he is forcibly removed from the UK.<sup>3</sup>

I wonder to myself: Who do these videos serve? What is the purpose? I play the video back to myself: “Nobody cares about our lives. Nobody is speaking for us. No-one even knows we exist... All they are trying to do right now is not let the news go out of this centre... I would like to say if there is anyone with any feelings, please speak for us. We are humans as well. We are same like you.”

1 You can watch the video 29 November 2014: Detainees Protest at Campsfield House IRC here: <https://vimeo.com/113244678>

2 See for example: England 2014; The Multicultural Politic 2014.

3 See the video “Four days they keep me in the cell” - Witness Reports on the Aftermath of Campsfield Assault on 29th Nov: <https://vimeo.com/116481472>.



## Introduction

On 29th November 2014, detainees at Campsfield House IRC call “England” to “Hear our voice” and for “anyone with any feelings” to “please speak for us.” This call is issued in stark awareness of immigration detention’s silencing effects, by detainees who struggle against the experience of being silenced. Nearly 100 different people, from all around the world, ‘spoke’ in a collective ‘voice’ in Campsfield on the 29th November 2014; in the *Standoff Films*’ video, just three speak in the name of them all. They expose the brutality of the immigration detention system, and they proclaim a collective humanity in defiance of this system’s dehumanising effects.

In recent years I have responded to such calls from UK immigration detention centres by making short videos with *Standoff Films*. The central aim is to relay messages spoken by people incarcerated within immigration detention centres to wider circuits of citizens. At first impression, these short *Standoff Films* videos might be understood as efforts to ‘give voice’ to detained people. On closer inspection, as I will show, they can also be understood as efforts to ‘speak for’ different people in detention. What is the significance of this distinction? A noteworthy tendency in contemporary efforts at emancipatory politics and media production can be characterised by a critical attitude to the very notion of representation, in political terms (e.g. in certain calls for “real democracy” issued by members of movements such as Occupy) and in artistic terms (e.g. the performative rather than indexical emphasis of some video art, such as *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989) or *Reassemblage* (1982) by Trinh Minh-Ha). Often influenced by feminist, critical race, post-structuralist or post-modern theories – frequently sharpened by lived experiences of oppression or betrayal by so-called ‘representatives’ – many thinkers and activists have rightly stressed the propensity for repression when some people ‘speak for’ others (Foucault and Deleuze 1977). Agency has been linked to ‘voice,’ and emancipation to one’s ability to ‘speak for’ oneself (Lorde 1984). We should not discount the emancipatory potential of ‘voice’ or ignore the repressive capacity of ‘speaking for’ others. But if we insist that people ‘speak for’ themselves, what does this mean for



Fig.2 29 November 2014: Detainees Protest at Campsfield House IRC (03:10) <https://vimeo.com/113244678>



Fig.3 29 November 2014: Detainees Protest at Campsfield House IRC (1:03) <https://vimeo.com/113244678>

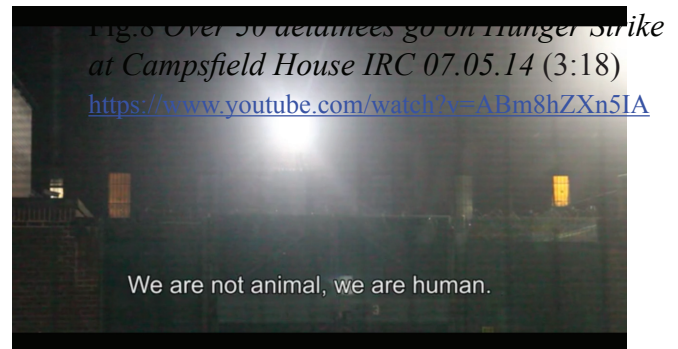


Fig.4 29 November 2014: Detainees Protest at Campsfield House IRC (1:12) <https://vimeo.com/113244678>

allyship? When we hear calls for representation, such as that issued in Campsfield on the 29th November 2014, how can allies respond in solidarity? Often activist filmmakers, journalists, scholars and media producers justify what they do as ‘giving voice.’ Yet, this seemingly simple goal, ‘to give voice,’ is rarely elaborated. What does it mean ‘to give voice’? Under certain conditions, is it appropriate – necessary even – to ‘speak for’ another?

In this essay I explore the inner dynamics of ‘giving voice’ by reflecting on the short videos I have made with *Standoff Films*. Documentary video production is an obviously social and technical process, which might highlight interpersonal dynamics that are also present in other media practices, where they are often more covert. Interpretation occurs at multiple stages of the video-making process. This process is shaped by video-makers, video-subjects and video-audiences, albeit in different ways. The patronising proposition, to ‘give voice,’ misrepresents this process: the giver of ‘voice’ is not as transparent as the phrase implies, nor is the subject of ‘voice’ as passive. The *Standoff Films* videos are obviously not seamless representations, as I discuss. Their principal value should be assessed, I suggest, not by the more or less accurate re-presentation of ‘voice,’ but in the way they activate ‘voice’ in a living social context. I believe this observation bears elaboration at a time when, in the human sciences and in emancipatory politics, an attentiveness to ‘voice’ is often proclaimed as the answer to a “crisis of representation” and the harbinger of a more self-reflective identity politics (Marcus and Fischer 1986; Lorde 1984; Hill Collins 1999; Couldry 2010).<sup>4 5</sup>

### Subjectivity and Objectivity

If testis designates the witness insofar as he intervenes as a third in a suit between two subjects, and if supertestes indicates the one who has fully lived through an experience and can therefore relate it to others, auctor signifies the witness insofar as his testimony always presupposes something that pre-exists him and whose reality and force must be validated or certified. Testimony is thus always an act of “author.” [Agamben 2000:149]

*Standoff Films* is an independent documentary production company, whose documentaries seek to

4 Some of the most pioneering and incisive calls for a greater attentiveness to ‘voice’ has come from feminists, and particularly feminist women of colour, whose critiques need to be heard in the academy and beyond. See for example: Minh-Ha 1989; Hull et al. 1982; Hill Collins, Patricia 1999; Wolf 1992; M. Z. Rosaldo 1980.

5 To name just a few key examples of anthropologists who emphasise the importance of ‘voice’ and ‘giving voice’ in different ways: Renato Rosaldo 1980, 1989; Goldstein 2012; Gubrium et al. 2014; Behar 1996; Thompson 1978; Portelli 2006.

“uncover unsettling realities by hearing from those most directly affected by the social and political situations we examine” (www.standoffilms.com). *Standoff Films* has made a number of longer and shorter documentaries, some of which feature academics, politicians, lawyers, and activists, in addition to people in and who have been in immigration detention, all of whom discuss and analyse the UK immigration detention system. Occasionally *Standoff Films* videos include photography or video recorded inside detention centres.<sup>6</sup> This is rare as image recording devices are prohibited within immigration detention, and I will not discuss these videos here. In this essay, I will focus on the short *Standoff Films* videos which solely feature the voices of currently detained people. These videos are made in response to calls issued from within immigration detention centres, channelled to the video-makers through a network of personal and extended contacts, inside and outside these centres. The video-makers record statements from people in detention over the phone. Audio-recordings are edited and set to moving-images of detention centre exteriors recorded by the video-makers (e.g. fig. 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19). There is no explanatory voice over.

These videos might appear as one of the most straightforward instances of ‘giving voice.’ The audience learns about the experience of immigration detention from people in detention – the *supertestes*, to use Agamben’s term. This is a principle aim. But, of course, the impression of hearing directly from detainees is composed by the video-makers. Voices are recorded, interpreted, edited, condensed, rearranged and replayed through the video-making process. It could be said that the redeployment of ‘voices’ in these short videos in fact constitutes *Standoff Films’* own cinematic ‘voice.’ In the words of the documentary film theorist Bill Nichols, it is the “specific orientation to the historical world that gives documentary a voice of its own” (Nichols 2001: 98). The videos

6 For example: “He did not die. So the officers started beating him up”: 6 March 2015, IRC the Verne <https://vimeo.com/122270700>; Detainees expose bed bugs & mice at Harmondsworth <https://vimeo.com/106044102>; Harmondsworth hunger striker speaks out 15.3.15 <https://vimeo.com/123100987>.

could even be understood to 'speak for' people in detention, insofar as the video-makers modify what people in detention actually tell them in an effort to distribute audio-statements to wider audiences. Rather than reproducing the 'voice' of people in immigration detention, the videos might be considered to instead reproduce the video-makers' secondary experiences as witnesses to the experiences of people in detention – as *testis* perhaps. In the videos we hear voices on the other end of a phone-line, and we see immigration detention centres from the outside. The imposing walls and barbed wire fences might suggest what we cannot see as an external witness, more than they tell us anything specific about what it is happening inside the centres.

By distributing short videos, *Standoff Films* seeks to expand an audience of witnesses to events in immigration detention – witnesses who are “situated as potential ethical actors who might intervene in the situation that produced the suffering that is on display” (McLagan 2003). 'Voice' is critical to this intention. In the *Standoff Films* videos testimony from people in detention is not explained, questioned or confirmed. It is simply contextualised with moving-images of detention centre exteriors (e.g. fig. 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19) and brief textual introductions (e.g. fig. 9). This allows video-audiences to be affected by a more immediate encounter with 'voices' from detention, and to be “with those who suffer in the moment” (Hatley 2000: 2). As James Hatley describes:

By witness is meant a mode of responding to the other's plight that exceeds an epistemological determination and becomes an ethical involvement. One must not only utter a truth about the victim but also remain true to her or him. In this latter mode of response, one is summoned to attentiveness, which is to say, to a heartfelt concern for and acknowledgement of the gravity of violence directed toward particular others. In this attentiveness, the wounding of the other is registered in the first place not as an objective fact but as a subjective blow, a persecution, a trauma. The witness refuses to forget the weight of this blow, or the depth of the wound it inflicts. [Hatley 2000:2–3]



Fig.5 29 November 2014: Detainees Protest at Campsfield House IRC (05:06) <https://vimeo.com/113244678>



Fig.6 Harmondsworth Hunger Strike 9 March 2015 (01:38). <https://vimeo.com/121766147>

Asylum seekers, foreign national offenders, visa over-stayers, and other people in immigration detention are systematically silenced and routinely disbelieved. Incarcerated and without valid work visas, they lack the means and resources to be heard among wider circuits of citizens for the most part. They are cross-examined and interrogated in interviews with Home Office officials and before immigration and asylum tribunals.<sup>7,8,9</sup> In widespread media representations, asylum seekers are portrayed as “untrustworthy” and “bogus,” and migrants as “illegal” and “scroungers.”<sup>10</sup> The most common category of person in immigration detention are people who have claimed asylum at some point.<sup>11</sup> Rather than interrogate the truth-claims

7 See Yeo 2014.

8 You can read the official rules of the First Tier Tribunal for Immigration and Asylum here: HM Courts & Tribunals Service, *First-tier Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum)* <https://www.gov.uk/courts-tribunals/first-tier-tribunal-immigration-and-asylum> (accessed August 27 2016).

9 See also Souter 2011.

10 See the *Migration in the News* report from the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford (2013). On criminalisation, see Haglund 2012.

11 See the *Immigration Detention in the UK* briefing from Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford (2016).



of people in detention over the phone, the *Standoff Films* video makers are with them in the moment. If these people in detention want an incident known, we contact other media outlets to encourage them to run the story as we can, and we produce and distribute short videos through our own networks. I believe we stay “true to” people in detention in the edited *Standoff Films* videos (Hatley 2000). The public conversation about immigration in the UK is toxic, while dramatic events in detention, including assaults by guards, protests, hunger strikes, revolts and deaths, often go unreported in mainstream news coverage. We believe it is important citizens know what is happening at immigration detention centres across the UK, often only a short bus journey away. Video-audiences are given the opportunity to hear and, crucially, to believe people in immigration detention in their own voice. I am convinced that this is inherently worthwhile.

“What is a politics of “testimony that substitutes its own truth for the truth of those in whose name it is deployed?” The anthropologist Didier Fassin asks this question in a discussion of “humanitarian witness,” who, Fassin contends, maintains political neutrality (frequently a pre-condition of their work in sites of conflict, where aid is desperately needed) by refusing to comment on a broader historical situation (Fassin 2012: 204–207). To further a compassionate cause, humanitarian witnesses reduce the “subject” to the “victim,” Fassin suggests, and focus on the simple fact of suffering rather than its external causes. In the process, they establish themselves as “spokespeople for the voiceless” (Fassin 2012: 204–207). Fassin’s critique of humanitarianism extends beyond aid-workers and humanitarian non-governmental organisations to a wide range of activists, media-professionals, and academics, who also substitute the truth of their representations for the truth of those in whose name they speak, or ‘give voice,’ in a spirit of charitable compassion.<sup>12</sup> In the case of *Standoff Films*, at least, we would have

12 Without discounting the affective power and phenomenological insights of ethnographic approaches sensitive to ‘voice,’ it is important to note the parallel between a humanitarian calls to compassion and calls for empathetic engagement by certain anthropologists, filmmakers and artists. Consider for example Carolyn S. Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner’s advocacy of “story truth” over “happening-truth” and their advocacy of “a communion borne of what Arthur Frank calls “the pedagogy of suffering”” (Ellis and Bochner 2006).

to actively edit audio-statements to turn people into mere victims. People in detention usually speak to the video-makers for the explicit purpose of raising awareness of a political situation. In the case of *Standoff Films*, to focus solely on people’s suffering in detention, and to ignore external causes, would constitute a betrayal.

The *Standoff Films* video-makers do not substitute the truth of their representations for the truth of particular people in detention in actuality. Rather, the video-making process allows us to quote people in detention in their own words through edited audio-recordings. Our videos do not make explicit judgements concerning the validity of specific testimonies. We simply choose to repeat certain statements issued by people in detentions without additional qualification, to let the reality of UK immigration detention reveal itself to video-audiences. How else can one understand immigration detention except through the testimonies of detainees? Even if we could see inside the detention centres, images of women and men locked in cells cannot ‘voice’ the reality of indefinite incarceration.

The *Standoff Films* videos actively engage audiences in a process of interpretation. We ask video-audiences to listen to people in detention without insisting on a specific conclusion. To this extent, the video’s restrained tone relates to the video-makers position as a secondary witness. It allows *Standoff Films* to simply submit testimony, rather than propagandise or proselytise, which can be easily dismissed as conspiracy. The “humanitarian witness” as *testis* might mobilise the rhetoric of *super-testes* on the behalf of the “voiceless” – a “subjectivity without subjects,” to use Fassin’s phrase. *Standoff Films*, by contrast, mobilises an “objectivity without objects” (my phrase), so that detainees’ can access a rhetoric of *testis*, to empower the truth-claims of their own speech among a citizen-public who often do not hear them. There may be no objective *testis* in reality; but rather than renege the citizen bystanders’ authority, the *Standoff Films* video-makers repeat what they have heard and seen as evidence, so that audiences may witness events in immigration detention centres for themselves, and come to their own interpretations.

“Experience” may not provide “evidence” in itself, as Joan Scott tells us. It first needs to be interpreted (Scott 1991). Experiences can challenge preconceptions, however, and unsettle hegemonic narratives through counter-examples. People in immigration detention are often assumed as ‘criminal’ – why else would they be locked up? Official UK state violence is commonly considered legitimate, and based in due process. In UK immigration detention centres, people are detained without a time limit. They are incarcerated without trial by an administrative decision. People in detention have not necessarily committed any crime, nor are they suspected of having done so. Countless abuses occur within immigration detention. In just three years, from 2011 to 2014, UK high courts ruled six times that Article Three of the European Convention on Human Rights forbidding “torture or...inhuman or degrading treatment” had been violated in UK immigration detention centres.<sup>13 14</sup>

Consider that most people in immigration detention are never able to launch legal claims which makes these rulings possible.

In the *Standoff Films* videos, detained people speak. Video-audiences are given the opportunity to witness events in immigration detention, and choose to enter an “ethical involvement” across distinctions of citizenship and migration status (Hatley 2000: 2). But people in immigration detention do not simply ‘voice’ their experiences. They suggest explanations: many blame “racism”; some suggest that “incompetence” and bureaucratic process is at fault; others point to security companies’ drive for profit as a reason for the increased use of privatised immigration detention centres. By listening to these usually silenced voices, some *Standoff Films* video-audiences may reflect on the nature of state and society in new ways. Some might take a more informed political position of their own as a result.

### Friday, 2 May 2014

Over 150 detainees go on hunger strike and stage a

<sup>13</sup> European Court of Human Rights, The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms <http://www.echr.coe.int/pages/home.aspx?p=basictexts> (accessed August 27 2016).

<sup>14</sup> For example: *f R (S) v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2014] EWHC 50 (Admin). See Pennington 2014; Phelps 2014.

sit down protest at Harmondsworth IRC in London. “We are going to demonstrate at the centre gates tomorrow to express solidarity with the protesting detainees,” Phil tells me. “Can you bring your camera?”

As I stand with a number of family members and supporters at the back of Harmondsworth IRC, I can faintly make out a hand waving through one of the windows (fig.6). A hunger striker tells us later on the phone, “everyone wants to see you in the windows. And then they are very happy... because you come down to support us, so I want to see you as well.”

After the demonstration, Phil and I call a number of people in Harmondsworth. More people want to record statements than we are able to handle. They all have different stories: they find hope in different places. Nonetheless, one man tells us “95% people are on hunger strike.” Is this really true? I do not doubt it on the phone or in the video, but just present his speech as it exists in actuality, to stay true to him and channel his demand: “The person needs to tell us how many days maximum they are going to keep us in detention.”

## Voice and Speech

Among living beings, only man has language. The voice is the sign of pain and pleasure, and this is why it belongs to other living beings (since their nature has developed to the point of having the sensations of pain and pleasure and of signifying the two). But language is for manifesting the fitting and the unfitting and the just and the unjust. To have the sensation of the good and the bad and of the just and the unjust is what is proper to men as opposed to other living beings, and the community of these things makes dwelling and the city. Aristotle, *The Politics* (1986: 10-18)

In the introduction to *Homo Sacer* (1998), the philosopher Giorgio Agamben elucidates the relationship between the ‘natural life’ (*bio*) of the home and the ‘political life’ (*zoe*) of the city (*polis*) with reference to the distinction Aristotle draws between ‘voice’ (*phone*) and ‘speech’ (*logos*) in *The Politics*. Agamben asserts: “The question “In what way does the living being have language?” corresponds exactly to the question “In what way does *bare life* dwell in the *polis*?” The living

being has *logos* by taking away and conserving its own voice in it, even as it dwells in the *polis* by letting its own *bare life* be excluded, as an exception, within it” (Agamben 1998:10).

For Agamben, then, the relationship of ‘voice’ to ‘speech’ is analogous to the relation of ‘life’ to ‘politics.’ It is one predicated on a substitution, whereby what is substituted is implicated in its absence. ‘Voice’ is in ‘speech,’ as ‘bare life’ is in the *polis*, through an inclusive exclusion, as an “exception.” This helps Agamben consider the nature of sovereignty with reference to Carl Schmitt’s infamous maxim: “Sovereign is he who decides on the exception.” Indeed, the analogy between ‘voice’ (*phone*) and ‘speech’ (*logos*), ‘natural life’ (*bio*) and ‘political life’ (*zoe*), as well as the subsequent substitution is understood by Agamben as the metaphysical underpinning of Western politics itself: “There is politics because man is the living being who, in language, separates and opposes himself to his own bare life and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion” (Agamben 1998: 8).<sup>15</sup> As that against which “politics” and “speech” finds their ontological basis, through an “inclusive exclusion,” in a “state of exception,” “bare life” and “voice” are by definition without “politics” and without “speech.”

The “state of exception,” Agamben provocatively suggests, finds its “materialization” in the “camp.” Agamben regards the “camp” “not as a historical fact and an anomaly belonging to the past ... but in some way as the hidden matrix and *nomos* of the political space in which we are still living.” On this basis, he assimilates all sorts of spaces of internment where “the normal order is de facto suspended” under the rubric of “camp,” including detention centres for undocumented migrants, tracing their genealogy if not their history back to an ontological distinction between “life” and “politics,” “voice” and “speech” articulated in ancient Athens. In the “camp” political rights, including human rights, do not in themselves bind as eternal principles, for, as a materialisation of the “state of exception,” the sovereign reigns supreme: “whether or not atrocities are committed depends not on law but on the civility and ethical sense of the

15 For an informative discussion of the relationship of ‘voice’ to ‘bare life’ also see Oswel 2009. I am indebted to David Oswel’s discussion.

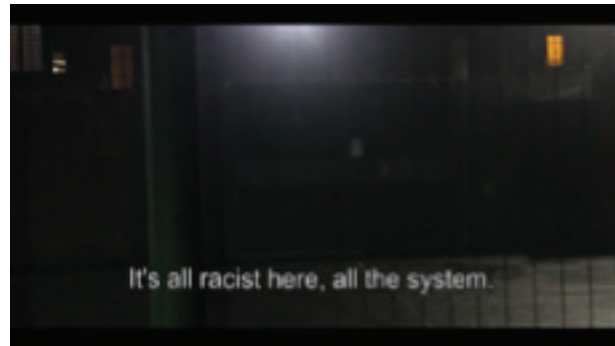


Fig.7, 8. 29 November 2014: Detainees Protest at Campsfield House IRC (02:16) <https://vimeo.com/113244678>

police who temporarily act as sovereign” (Agamben 1998: 18-19; see also Agamben: 2005).

The philosophy of Giorgio Agamben has obvious resonance for activists and academics hoping to theoretically critique the limitations of human rights and conceptualise the breakdown of due legal process for undocumented migrants (e.g. Bernardot 2008; Rahola 2007; Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2004; Schinkel W 2009). Without commenting on Agamben’s metaphysical import directly, empirical realities are far more ambiguous and complex than the abstract paradigm “state of exception” can articulate. The law does not simply cease to exist in immigration detention. Rather, as is true of many of Agamben’s so-called “camps,” the law holds, with many exceptions.<sup>16</sup> The structural vulnerability of detainees does create an environment in which guards often abuse power with impunity, but it is not the case that they act as sovereign limited only by their own moral sensibilities; a political and legal frame-

16 For further critical discussion of Agamben’s notion of the “state of exception” with reference to different empirical examples see Fassin 2012. I am indebted to Didier Fassin’s remarks.





Fig.9-12 Hunger Strike at Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre forces Home Office to negotiate, May, 2014 (clockwise from top left: 0:17, 1:22, 04:19, 2:03) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ow8MauT13c>

work operates nevertheless. Immigration detention is shaped by juridical and political processes – processes which detainees struggle to influence. Agamben may appear as one of the staunchest critics of liberal discourses of humanitarianism, but his political theology seems to provide no practical political possibility except for humanitarian intervention. For, if detainees are reduced to “bare life,” interned within a “state of exception,” until the ontological basis of western politics is overthrown, what can we do but ‘speak for’ them?

As a major means of resistance in immigration detention, hunger strikes might suggest that people in detention primarily engage politics by means of their own “bare life.” If you actually listen to what detainees say, however, it is clear that hunger strikes are actually an explicitly political process of claim-making and collective organisation – processes which a state of “bare life” would render impossible.<sup>17</sup> As

one person on hunger strike told me, repeating a sentiment I have heard from protesting detainees countless times: “They are treating us like we are animals or less than animals; we are human.”<sup>18</sup> The brutal system of immigration detention can crush hope, as suggested by the horrifically high suicide rates in immigration detention centres, reaching an average of more than one a day in 2016 according to official figures.<sup>19</sup> But the political force of hunger strikes do not principally rest in the ending of detainees’ lives. Rather, detainees’ mobilise hunger strikes as a means of purposeful political speech, as they struggle against the UK immigration detention system. Some hunger strikes are carried out to the ‘extreme’ with serious consequences for those involved.<sup>20</sup> Many hunger strikes are not ‘actually’ hunger strikes as generally

17 For a discussion of political activity in so called “states of exception” which Agamben’s philosophy would render impossible, see: Negri 2007 and Ziarek 2008.

18 For a discussion of Agamben’s philosophy with reference to hunger strikes in Australian immigration detention centres, see Bailey 2009. I am indebted to Richard Bailey’s consideration.

19 There were 393 recorded suicide attempts in UK immigration detention centres in 2015. See results of a freedom of information request by No Deportations (2015). Also see Diane Taylor (2016).

20 For example, see Allison 2013; Hughes 2012.

conceived – some people eat and drink, but not the food they are given. They register as not eating on centre records to mobilise the hunger strike as a collective symbolic statement. During the March 2015 hunger strikes, a close collaborator told me about a conversation they had with the director of a big humanitarian organisation, who dismissively defended the organisations’ decision not to publicise this hunger strike because “they aren’t really hunger striking, are they!” Could he want them to be reduced to “bare life” for real, in order for him to ‘give’ them ‘voice’ as he ‘speaks for’ them?

“They are treating us like we are animals or less than animals; we are human.” In statements like these, the importance of the distinction between ‘voice’ and ‘speech’ becomes clear. If ‘voice’ is expressive of experience, no-one can simply ‘give voice’ to the *supertestes*, to use Agamben’s terms; neither should its expression be celebrated without self-reflection, especially when it is the ‘voice’ of the ‘oppressed.’ As the anthropologist Gerald Sider reminds us, agency does not reside simply in the expression of experience, but in the struggle “against experience” (Sider 1997). Perhaps those of us who want to employ media as part of an emancipatory agenda should not unreflectively ‘give voice’ – a patronising and debilitating notion – but consider the purposeful ‘speech’ of people we seek to work in solidarity with. This might enable us to remain “true to” the people whose testimony we represent, in the way in which ‘voice’ is not only expressed, but deployed (Hatley 2000).

People in detention actively shape the *Standoff Films* video representations through their ‘speech.’ They do not simply express their own individual ‘voices,’ but ‘speak for’ themselves and others, often as part of a collective ‘voice.’ Like the *Standoff Films* videos, pronouncements by people in detention are not the product of a linear and transparent process of mere expression. According to Oxford based criminologist, Mary Bosworth, who spoke with detainees at Campsfield House a few days after the 29th November protest, many detainees had not taken part in the protest and some had even labelled those who had as ‘troublemakers’ (Bosworth, 2014 private conversation with Isotta Rosilini). It is clearly vital to reflect on the silences in one’s representations; but

what should media-makers do about these necessary silences? We cannot (nor should we attempt to) ‘give voice’ to all ‘voices’ in the end. We might consider instead: who we ‘speak’ with, to what effects, with which ‘voices,’ to what affects.

### *Monday, 9 March 2015*

Three hundred detainees launch a mass hunger strike at Harmondsworth IRC and spark an uprising across the UK immigration detention estate. Detainees at Colnbrook IRC, Dungavel IRC, BrookHouse IRC, and Tinsley House IRC join the hunger strike. A riot breaks out at the Verne IRC.<sup>21</sup> Women at Yarl’s Wood IRC take mass collective action and write “We are not animals” across their t-shirts.<sup>22</sup>

*Standoff Films* makes five videos during this time. As only one part of a broader network, we help link people in detention to other media outlets.<sup>23</sup> Through the hard work of many, in and out of detention, there is some success. *Channel Four* fly a helicopter over Harmondsworth to reveal the ongoing occupation of the detention centre yard (fig.14).<sup>24</sup> The *Independent* newspaper publishes two articles on the hunger strike.<sup>25</sup> A number of independent media outlets run further stories.<sup>26</sup> The most extensive coverage comes from *Russia Today*, the English language media-outlet of Putin’s Russia.<sup>27</sup> It is their top item of international news for a week. The channel broadcasts *Standoff Films*’ videos in their program. They

21 See the Standoff Films video, “He did not die. So the officers started beating him up”: 6 March 2015, IRC the Verne” <https://vimeo.com/122270700>.

22 See Basu 2015.

23 A new organisation called *Detained Voices* was founded at this time (<https://detainedvoices.com/>). Volunteers at *Detained Voices* transcribe statements from people in detention ad verbatim and publish these online. They were especially effective at increasing the news coverage of the March 2015 hunger strikes. Statements from people in detention recorded by *Detained Voices* were quoted by a range of media outlets.

24 See Whelan 2015.

25 Green 2015; Green and Dutta 2015.

26 For example, Noborderer 2015.

27 This was not simply a media success. There are also immigration detention centres in Russia, which are not reported on *Russia Today*. *Russia Today* regularly relishes opportunities to report negative events in the UK. I believe the hunger strikes were appropriated to support *Russia Today*’s own imperial agenda. This exacerbated my concern that the hunger strikes were being reported in a way that seemed (a) unlikely to put productive pressure on the UK Home Office or the private security companies who run UK immigration removal centres by reaching large numbers of UK citizens, but which (b) encouraged the hunger strikers through media coverage nonetheless.

incessantly call the video-makers, asking for quotes, updates, and interviews. I find myself in a dilemma: I do not want to 'speak for' the detainees on hunger strike, a process I have been navigating over the previous two years, but I do want their 'voice' to be heard and their 'speech' to be listened to.

## Representation And Re-Presentation

The unrecognised contradiction within a position that valorises the concrete experience of the oppressed, while being so uncritical about the historical role of the intellectual, is maintained by a verbal slippage. Deleuze makes this remarkable pronouncement: "A theory is like a box of tools. Nothing to do with the signifier" ... Two senses of representation are being run together: representation as "speaking for," as in politics, and representation as "re-presentation," as in art or philosophy... To cover up the discontinuity with an analogy that is presented as proof reflects again a paradoxical subject-privileging... The banality of leftist intellectuals' lists of self-knowing, politically canny subalterns stands revealed; representing them, the intellectuals represent themselves as transparent. [Spivak 1999: 28]

In the discussion later entitled *Intellectuals and Power* (1977), Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze decry "the indignity of speaking for others" and challenge "representation" itself on ethical, epistemological, and political grounds. They emphasise a critical insight of poststructuralist theory: that reality is too heterogeneous to be reduced to a single narrative: "theory... is practice. But it is local and regional... and not totalising" (Foucault and Deleuze). On this basis, Deleuze opines: "only those directly concerned can speak in a practical way on their own behalf," as "speaking for others... lead[s] to a division of power, to a distribution of this new power which is consequently increased by double repression"; leading Foucault to proclaim: "all those on whom power is exercised to their detriment... can begin the struggle on their own terrain." "Representation is dead," they declare (Foucault and Deleuze 1977).

A monolithic block – "detainees" – is somewhat constructed by *Standoff Films'* re-presentations,

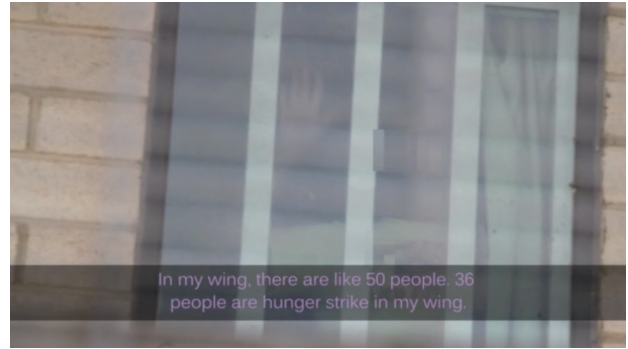


Fig.13 Harmondsworth Hunger Strike 9 March 2015 (1:16) <https://vimeo.com/121766147>



Fig. 14 Harmondsworth Detainees Launch Hunger Strike Video by Channel 4 (00:45) <http://www.channel4.com/news/harmondsworth-immigration-detention-centre-hunger-strike>

despite our efforts to stay "true to" each speaker (Hatley 2000). By necessity, only a small number of people speak about the experience of detention in our videos. Insofar as the videos are understood to represent a more general situation, they obscure multiple heterogeneous 'voices' incarcerated in immigration detention centres. This could be considered "repression" in Deleuze's terms. Equally, in each individual testimony, the *Standoff Films* video-makers cut up and re-arrange each speaker's words to some extent, in an effort to create compelling videos. Could *Standoff Films* be silencing certain 'voices' by 'speaking' in the name of detainees? Could 'protest,' 'hunger strike,' and 'resistance,' function as tropes through which people in detention are forced to express themselves to 'speak' through *Standoff Films*? Could these videos simply turn 'detainees' into 'agents' of 'resistance,' an imagined 'revolutionary' 'class,' rather than 'victims,' reduced to 'bare life' – just another name of a need to be spoken for – while legitimising such a position



with reference to some edited quotes from a selective minority?

“The intellectual’s solution is not to abstain from representation” insists Gayatri Chakravorty in her essay “Can the subaltern speak?” In eliding two notions of representation, Spivak suggests, Foucault and Deleuze misleadingly present themselves as transparent when they of course re-present others. Spivak suggests that these activist-philosophers thereby renounce the responsibility to represent the interests of those who cannot “speak” and be “heard” “in the First World, under the standardization and regimentation of socialized capital” – namely the “colonial and postcolonial subaltern,” who is “defined as being on the other side of an epistemic fracture” (Spivak 1988:40–59). Precisely because “the oppressed under postmodern capital have no necessarily unmediated access to “correct resistance” (Spivak 1988:62), Spivak insists, “radical practice should attend to this double session of representations” (Spivak 1988:33).

The testimony *Standoff Films* re-presents in short videos is not issued by “subaltern” people as defined by Spivak. Even if they were subaltern before they entered the UK, they cease to be properly subaltern by Spivak’s definition the moment they speak to any citizen-filmmaker, and thus establish “lines of communication” to “circuits of citizenship,” and so insert themselves “into the long road to hegemony,” which should be celebrated (Spivak 1988: 40–59). As one node in detainees’ access to “circuits of citizenship,” the *Standoff Films* video-makers are well positioned to re-present their speech in an effort to represent their interests. This is not to make missionary claims. Unstable migration status, imprisonment, and the vulnerability entailed, restricts detainees’ access to channels of communication and discourages openly critical speech for many. Most detainees and ex-detainees maintain anonymity in *Standoff Films*’ videos because they fear for their safety. Many more do not speak in the videos at all for this reason.<sup>28</sup>

28 There are numerous instances where media and activist pressures have helped prevent imminent deportations or aided people’s asylum claims – but there can be negative consequences for people in detention who are publicly critical of the UK immigration detention system. As a *Standoff Films* video-maker, I have spoken with people in detention who later report that they have been “beaten up” by a group of guards



Fig.15 Harmondsworth Hunger Strike 9 March 2015 (01:10) <https://vimeo.com/121766147>

In addition to the “epistemic fracture” which Spivak describes as separating the “colonial or postcolonial subaltern” from “hegemonic” “circuits of citizenship,” the more overt fact of state-enforced border controls function as a critical barrier to the transmission of subaltern ‘speech.’ For obvious reasons, it is hard to know how many people are silenced within UK immigration detention centres.

*Standoff Films*, then, does not ‘give voice’ – a patronising notion – but transmits and translates ‘speech’ across physical and cultural barriers. To effectively fulfil this purpose, the *Standoff Films* videos need to be compelling and engage different audiences (Gregory 2006). The solution to Foucault and Deleuze’s critique of representation cannot be to transparently ‘give voice’ – an impossible and often counterproductive task. In making videos, testimony and protest is mediated, by necessity: we should not pretend otherwise. At the same time, we should not fixate on videos’ opacity. We cannot forsake re-presentation in the name of simulacral production whose claim on reality exists only in its “effects” (Barthes 1998; Deleuze 1983; Baudrillard 1995). In an immediate context of state violence, often unapprehend by the citizenry at large, the *Standoff Films* video-makers do not want to over-qualify the videos’ truth-claims

or put in solitary confinement without their belongings for days on end as a result of their public criticism (see “Four days they keep me in the cell” - *Witness Reports on the Aftermath of Campsfield Assault on 29th Nov* <https://vimeo.com/116481472> and *Campsfield House: An Immigration Removal Centre* <https://vimeo.com/106182843>). In these instances, repression did not stop these two people from wanting to speak to the media. Nonetheless, people in detention have reasons to fear for their immediate physical safety. Furthermore, being labelled as “non-compliant” on official records can have longer term consequences for an immigration or asylum case in certain instances.

in the language of subjectivity and contingency, or in experimental explorations of 'voice.'

Rather than see lines of historical differentiation simply as impassable "epistemic fracture[s]" or as "differend" (Lyotard quoted in Spivak et al. 1996) across which one simply cannot communicate (which is surely true to some extent), perhaps we conceptually conceive of communication across historical distinctions by reversing the common sense notion of translation (Benjamin 1969). Rather than grounding the truth-value of the *Standoff Films* videos in the uninterrupted direct transmission of 'voices' from detention, perhaps the videos' truth-claims should be based on the careful listening and quality of interpretation at every stage of the video-making process, by video-makers and by video-audiences? Rather than translating detainees 'voice' into the video-makers own 'speech' – as if we could simply 'give voice' without interpretation – perhaps the video-makers should seek to transform the cinematic 'voice' of the *Standoff Films* videos to better appreciate and incorporate elements of detainees' 'speech'?

The *Standoff Films* videos obviously do not pretend to have an authoritative panoptical view on events in immigration detention. Neither do they deny the authority of their re-presentations. They bring collective demands together with individual self-expressions. The videos display images of detention centre complexes and individual hands pressed up against the windows (fig.15-16). The videos do not disguise their necessary aporias. Rather they emphasise some of the barriers to communication – most importantly, brutal state enforced border controls – in collaboration with people in detention, as part of a genuine effort to speak across these barriers, in a double play of re-presentation and representation.

### *Wednesday, 11 March 2015*

"The response to protest is like they don't have ears to hear it, they don't have heart to beat," one detainee tells me in interview over the phone. I have mixed feelings about the hunger strike. People feel empowered and it is powerful to witness. I hear it in their voices. But, I have seen hunger strikes before. I have seen how the Home Office and media respond. Even if the domestic media attention were significant, and



Fig.16 Harmondsworth Hunger Strike 9 March 2015 (00:53) <https://vimeo.com/121766147>



Fig.17 From Harmondsworth IRC: The Silence and Noise Around the Hunger Strike (00:32) <https://vimeo.com/122324903>

even if people in detention start to die, it is far from clear that the Home Office would listen. The hunger strike that received the most media attention in recent years is that of Nigerian asylum seeker Isa Muesza. The Home Office had an official end of life plan with details of how to handle a media enquiry in the event that he die before his deportation.<sup>29</sup> In the end, Isa was deported after 100 days on hunger strike, despite being unable to see or walk. It does not seem likely the hunger strike will be effective in improving the external situation of the hunger strikers. I take active care never to encourage anyone to not eat, or to give personal or legal advice of any kind to people in detention. But making videos about the hunger strikes – because of the hunger strikes, in fact – surely encourages people to use this means to raise awareness. If I did not think the hunger strike was hopeful, why was I representing it? Do these videos actually represent the interests of people in detention? Could I be feeding misplaced hope by echoing detainees' call to be heard back to people in detention?

<sup>29</sup> See Allison 2013.

*Friday, 13 March 2015*

*Russia Today* broadcasts the March 11th *Standoff Films'* video about Mitie's response to the hunger strike. One of the featured hunger strikers immediately calls me from Harmondsworth IRC: "Yes, I heard my voice in the news...I am really happy that I could hear myself explaining to the world the kind of evil the Home Office, the immigration officer, the caseworker, the Mitie, the security, the evil they are perpetrating in the lives of innocent people. We are all 24 hours sitting in front of the TV watching this story."

At issue is not simply whether I foster or dampen hope with reference to an external political objective; the nature of the relationships I establish across lines of differentiation are inherently important. After all, I am one of a number of channels transmitting information about the hunger strike's reception back to people in detention. The man in Harmondsworth continues: "We wish other news channels would take this story out. We are very disappointed with the BBC. Why are they not covering our story? Because they are British. They are meant to speak the truth. They are just like the Home Office."

"The Home Office, they are playing ignorant, they know they know they know what they are doing. Let the world, let the MPs, let, let even the Prime Minister should know, he knows all this. The Home Secretary knows all this. We are suffering here, we are slaves here. We are being treated like criminals here... If you die, you die in your room... Harmondsworth and fast track should be ruled out completely. We are being intimidated here. We are scared here. We are being harassed here. We are being threatened here. Please help us, to achieve the truth. Because we want freedom. And that's what we want. Thank you very much."

## Collaboration and Appropriation

I would like to set forth the notion that transmitting an apparatus of production without—as much as possible—transforming it, is a highly debatable procedure even when the content of the apparatus which is transmitted seems to be revolutionary in nature... a substantial part of so-called left-wing writers have no other social function whatever, than eternally to draw new effects from the political

situation in order to amuse the public...It made documentaries fashionable. But we should ask: to whom is this technique useful? [Benjamin 1970]

The documentary video-maker should, if we follow Walter Benjamin, transform the video-making apparatus so that rather than turning "political commitment into an object of contemplative pleasure," the video-maker might make "co-workers out of readers or spectators." Rather than be a "benefactor" or an "ideological patron" – an "impossible position" – Benjamin suggests that "the place of the intellectual should be determined, or better, chosen, on the basis of their position in production." We should not simply "report," but "struggle"; we should not "play the role of spectator," but "actively intervene" (Benjamin 1970). We cannot only re-present 'voice,' we must produce directed 'speech' which represents our collective interests.

One way one might transform the video-making "apparatus" is through collaboration. Stable distinctions between the representor and represented – the 'giver' and 'receiver' of 'voice,' the 'speaker' and the 'spoken for' – might be challenged by deliberately and explicitly emphasising the necessary collaborations involved in the production of representations. Collaboration might counteract the "double repression" of "speaking for" others (Foucault and Deleuze 1977), while facilitating wider distributional networks through re-presentations. As Luke Lassiter insists, collaboration is often especially "appropriate when dealing with voice" (Lassiter 2008:75).

*Standoff Films'* videos are collaborative. They are produced in conversation with detainees' purpose-



Fig.18 From Harmondsworth IRC: The Silence and Noise Around the Hunger Strike (00:48) <https://vimeo.com/122324903>



ful 'speech.' There are asymmetries nonetheless. The author may (re)imagine themselves as a producer given their position in production, as Benjamin insists. In the context of identity politics though, where it is not one's essential position in the means of production, but the particularities of one's positionality within fields of power, such as, but not limited to, circuits of citizenship, the author cannot and should not attempt to 'level' their position vis-à-vis other social actors by engaging egalitarian delusions. As the anthropologist Harri Englund points out, a professionalised official rhetoric of collaboration may "dissimulate underlying asymmetries" which take place in a participatory project (Englund 2010). A language of collaboration might disguise appropriation, I would add. Proclamations of radical equality cannot undo participants' different interests. Even though the *Standoff Films'* videos are self-funded and there are no financial profits, how does one equally distribute the social capital of filmmaking to all involved in the production process? Even if I remorse the fact, is it not the case that I advantage myself by making these videos and writing about the process here, while many of the people who went on hunger strike are still locked in detention centres, deported, or struggling to live without legitimate access to money as undocumented migrants?

The issue of appropriation is not simply an issue of re-presentation – who 'speaks' about who – but also representation – whose interests are furthered. Rather than pretending interests are the same, Englund notes that divergent interests can be productive as well as unproductive (Englund 2010). In my own case, it is in fact the difference in my position, as a secure citizen, and my different interests, as a video-maker, rather than a hopeful immigrant or asylum seeker, which might make me potentially helpful to people in detention in the first place. If I was also in detention, I would not be of much additional use.

This is not to excuse enacting privilege with impunity. Our different positionalities might cause us to pause and reflect upon what one is specifically well positioned to accomplish, and to consider and discuss these with others (when possible). Rather than renounce collaboration on the basis of its difficulties in favour of mere witnessing, perhaps we need



Fig.19 From Harmondsworth IRC: The Silence and Noise Around The Hunger Strike (01:41) <https://vimeo.com/122324903>

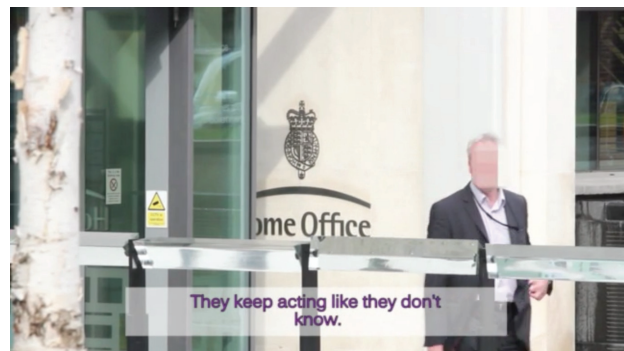


Fig.20 From Harmondsworth IRC: The Silence and Noise Around The Hunger Strike (02:52) <https://vimeo.com/122324903>

to reinvigorate collaboration on the basis of alliances across and between antagonistic and shared interests, by finding the common ground in our necessarily enjoined struggles for liberation.<sup>30</sup>

## Conclusion

In the case of the videos I have made with *Standoff Films*, as we have seen, the video-makers, those represented, and video-audiences, are all active in a process of video-production and interpretation. These videos might be read as transparent re-presentations – 'giving voice,' if you like – whereby people in detention can be heard themselves, more or less accurately. Alternatively, these videos could be labelled as opaque representations – 'speaking for,' if you will – whereby the filmmakers 'speak for' detainees, more or less

<sup>30</sup> As this essay has noted, there are many important roles for a 'witness' – one being to reproduce and distribute the witnessing experience for other audiences. Insofar as the resultant representations further the interests of participants whose experiences are 'witnessed,' I think we should emphasise that this is not mere 'witnessing.'



Fig. 21-24 Over 50 detainees go on Hunger Strike at Campsfield House IRC 07.05.14 (clockwise from top left: 4:36, 4:40, 4:50, 4:45) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABm8hZXn5IA>

faithfully. In reality, the *Standoff Films* videos are neither simply mimetic re-presentations, nor are they merely simulacral inventions. In between, the abstract co-ordinates of 'giving voice' and 'speaking for,' *Standoff Films*' videos necessarily engage a seemingly simple complex double-play of re-presentation and representation. Multiple speaking and interpreting agents collaborate across lines of historical differentiation with divergent and intersecting interests. They modify the 'voice' and 'speech' of one another in a dialogic process. It is in these social interactions that representations are formed. They take their power (and lack thereof) in this living social context.

At *Standoff Films* we have developed what I have called an 'objectivity without objects.' We re-present detainees' own speech in a collaborative effort to illuminate actually existing political situations to a "witnessing public" (McLagan 2003). The silencing effects of immigration detention necessitates representation. There are risks. We necessarily interpret the purposeful speech of people in immigration detention. We edit and modify audio-recordings, hoping to incorporate some of the texture and essential meaning of voices recorded from within detention, in an effort to stay "true to" the interests expressed (Hatley

2000). On reflection, rather than engage hubristic fantasies of 'giving voice' or 'speaking for' others, I believe *Standoff Films* seeks to modify our own cinematic voice by listening to people in immigration detention, in an effort to serve an emancipatory expression and politics.

The *Standoff Films*' videos only represent one instance of representing testimony and protest, but this empirical example can help us re-think abstract conceptions. This auto-ethnographic reflection suggests the following three observations to conclude:

'Voice' may be intimately related to experience.<sup>31</sup> It cannot be 'given,' only re-presented. It is necessarily interpreted and mediated in the process. This can be by those who share and those who do not share the experience it is understood to express.

People do not merely express experience, but struggle on its basis, often against its conditions.<sup>32</sup> This essay has employed a distinction between 'voice' and 'speech' to differentiate mere expression and deliberate proclamation. Perhaps those of us

31 'Voice' is often considered important because it expresses particular experiences, often experiences of oppression, marginalisation and other forms of violence. See for instance Goldstein 2012.

32 See Sider 1997.



interested in producing media in the service of an emancipatory politics should not ask whether we 'give voice' accurately, but how people 'speak' through us? This might enable more powerful and considered re-presentations and representations, which employ, rather than fetishise, a number of different 'voices,' to access a range of audiences in different ways.

The power of hearing from particular 'voices,' your own or others,' should not be underestimated. That said, the power of 'voice' is not rooted not in an isolated 'voice,' but in the affects and effects a 'voice' produces when socially activated. To consider the emancipatory potential of certain representations, it seems pressing to not only ask, whose 'voice' speaks, but how might this 'speech' effect whom? In re-presentation and representation, there will necessarily be aporias. The solution is not to refrain from representation, but to consider the silences within representations when possible, and produce more deliberate representations in light of their likely consequences.<sup>33</sup> Further ethnographic study of representational processes in video and other media is needed. Processes of inter-subjective production, distribution, and interpretation need to be analysed beyond the narrow perspectives of 'author' and 'audience' as typically conceived, so that we might better understand the nature and power of different re-presentations and representations in living social contexts.<sup>34</sup> This auto-ethnographic exploration of the inner-dynamics of 'giving voice' from this filmmaker's self-reflective perspective is a nod towards further research in this direction.

33 For further discussion of the importance of acknowledging silences in representations, see Spivak and Morris 2010 and Sider 1997.

34 Much of the anthropological literature on documentary film and video focuses on questions of technical production (e.g. Barbash and Castaing-Taylor 1997); the nature of the medium (e.g. MacDougall and Castaing-Taylor 1998); authorial crafts and intensions (e.g. Henley 2009); histories and theories of production and reception (e.g. Banks and Ruby 2011). This writer hopes for further ethnographic study of the film-production process itself, so that we might better understand the nature of films/videos claims on specific social realities in light of their intersubjective production processes. For one study which explores the complexity of participatory knowledge production see Alexandra 2015.

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