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EPrint URI: <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/16426>

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Incantations of Place in Voice and Song

Physical place, mythic place, temporal place, geological place, pastoral place, rural place, colonial place, post-colonial place. Jurassic place. How do places sound? Linked by limestone and my own lived places, this talk uses material from over a decade to consider how voice and song evoke place. The place is England in the twenty-first century and specifically, two limestone counties in the west and southwest, Gloucestershire and Dorset, it uses six examples, three voices from digital storytelling projects with migrants and veterans, and three songs from the Dorset musician PJHarvey. Pulling a thread through the voices and Harvey's albums *Is This Desire* (1998), *Let England Shake* (2011) and *I Inside the Old Year Dying* (2023), the talk spotlights the bass notes of place, its presence and elusiveness, to argue that they foreground the instability of regional, national, and imperial place.

Harvey's radical pastoral work sits outside narratives of Englishness that have surfaced in British popular music culture, bringing us into a reckoning with the loss, yearning and violence associated with Englishness and placed identity. Equally, the migrant and veteran voices reveal memories of place that bring to the fore complex tapestries of empire and migration. Listening to songs of the chalk hills or Holloways of Dorset, stories of the deserts of 1960s' Yemen, and the train stations of 1930s' Vienna affords a sounding out of narratives and memories of place that reframe archives of Englishness.

The talk draws on theories of music, sound and place to illustrate how (accented) voice and (popular) song operate as incantations of place and belonging that are amalgams of places solid, places left, places furrowed and places bereft. Between fitting in and longing for, belonging sounds out as something we might both strive for and mourn. It is always before and behind us; we are forever on its edge(s), somewhere between flux and firm ground, and we can hear those oscillations and paeans in the six songs and stories from the limestone ridges of England.